

COBAN, ALAN

ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY LIFE

IN THE MIDDLE

AGES

CHAPTER ONE

The undergraduate experience

The undergraduate experience in the medieval English universities was intended to be exclusively male. This remained the situation in England until the nineteenth century. In 1832, at the newly-founded University of London, University College took the first steps that, later in the century, were to make it an important pioneering force in the realm of women's university education.<sup>1</sup> It was not until the 1870s and 1880s, however, that women students began to infiltrate the hallowed portals of Oxford and Cambridge. The first women's institutions that were established for their reception were Girton and Newnham at Cambridge and Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville at Oxford.<sup>2</sup> In late-medieval England women in the middling and upper echelons of society could acquire varying degrees of education through parents and guardians, nurses, domestic chaplains, parish priests and, less frequently, through male tutors or mistresses, their female equivalents. Women's education could be furthered by girls being boarded out for a period in a household of similar or higher social standing or by undergoing a spell of residence in a nunnery where educational facilities were often

1. See S. Rothblatt, "London: a metropolitan university?", in *The university and the city: from medieval origins to the present*, T. Bender (ed.) (New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 129.
2. C. N. L. Brooke & R. Highfield, *Oxford and Cambridge* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 310-19; V. H. H. Green, *Oxford University* (London, Batsford, 1974), pp. 185-6; M. Sanderson, *The universities in the nineteenth century* (London & Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 173-7.

provided for young laity of both sexes.<sup>3</sup> Apart from elements of formal education, young women were also trained in religion, deportment, music and dance, and in other appropriate social graces. It has to be stressed, however, that while women of means might well accumulate an array of educational and social accomplishments, they were firmly excluded from the world of formal education, from the world of the universities and, with a few minor exceptions, from the schools.<sup>4</sup>

The masculine character of university life in medieval England was reinforced by other considerations. In common with many continental universities, Oxford and Cambridge had inherited a remnant of the monastic ethos that for centuries had so permeated education. This monastic influence was much diluted in the eleventh and twelfth centuries following the rise of the cathedral and other types of urban schools that were the immediate precursors of the university age.<sup>5</sup> The monastic legacy found expression in the communal mode of living prescribed for the academic halls of Oxford, the hostels of Cambridge and for the colleges of both universities. Monastic influence is also manifest in the denial of bodily pleasures that is inherent in so many of the university and collegiate statutory prohibitions relating to non-academic activities.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the commanding presence at medieval Oxford and Cambridge of communities of monks, regular canons and the four orders of friars served to emphasize to the undergraduate population that university education was a male corporate enterprise that was in a state of continuous interaction with the prevailing religious culture.

3. N. Orme, *Education and society in medieval and renaissance England* (London & Ronceverte, West Virginia, Hambledon, 1989), pp. 153–75, 224–42; see also H. Leyser, *Medieval women: a social history of women in England 450–1500* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), p. 138.

4. See the examples cited by N. Orme, *English schools in the Middle Ages* (London, Methuen, 1973), pp. 54–5; see also J. A. H. Moran, *The growth of English schooling 1340–1548* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 69–70.

5. For the cathedral schools see G. Paré, A. Brunet, P. Tremblay, *La renaissance du xii<sup>e</sup> siècle: les écoles et l'enseignement* (Paris, Vrin, 1933); E. Lesne, "Les écoles de la fin du viii<sup>e</sup> siècle à la fin du xii<sup>e</sup>", in *Histoire de la propriété ecclésiastique en France* (Lille, Facultés Catholiques de Lille, 1940); S. d'Irsay, *Moyen âge et renaissance*, vol. 1 of *Histoire des universités françaises et étrangères des origines à nos jours* (Paris, Picard, 1933). See also J. Verger, "les écoles cathédrales méridionales. Etat de la question", *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 30, 1995, pp. 245–68.

6. See below, Chapter 6, pp. 198–211: "Recreations and entertainments".

In addition to monastic influences, English undergraduates were to some degree aligned to the secular clergy. Although the English universities strove from an early date to define themselves as essentially lay corporations, their members, in company with students and teaching masters throughout Europe, had acquired the coveted privilege of clerical status.<sup>7</sup> In parallel with the secular clergy, English scholars were recognized as clerks, even if many of them were so only by virtue of having the first tonsure, the lowest of the minor orders.<sup>8</sup> Clerical status brought with it the claim that undergraduates and all genuine scholars of whatever degree were immune from the normal processes of secular jurisdiction. This implied that English scholars were subject to the ecclesiastical courts. In the university arena this signified, for most purposes, the chancellors' courts that were deemed to be of ecclesiastical derivation. From this point of view, and also because the career prospects of so many university members were focused on the church, English scholars could be seen as almost forming a branch of the ecclesiastical order. Indeed, in the eyes of the citizens of Oxford and Cambridge the scholars were viewed as constituting elitist fraternities that had a lot in common with the mystique of ecclesiastical corporations and had arrogated to themselves unwarranted privileges.<sup>9</sup> This broad association between university members and the army of the church ran counter to the idealized self-image of the English universities as a separate estate in society that was independent of ecclesiastical controls. Nevertheless, the ambiguity remains that English undergraduates and their graduate colleagues comprised, in a tenuous sense, a kind of ecclesiastical sodality. As such, they would have readily acquiesced in the church's

7. Oxford's scholars received clerical immunity in the award of the papal legate of June 1214. Versions of this award, which was in essence Oxford University's first charter of privileges, are printed by H. E. Salter (ed.), *The medieval archives of the University of Oxford* (2 vols), Oxford Historical Society 70, 73 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1917–19), I, pp. 2–4, and by H. Anstey (ed.), *Munimenta academica: documents illustrative of academical life and studies at Oxford* (2 vols) (London, Longman, 1868), I, pp. 1–4. There is no comparable papal award for Cambridge, but it may be assumed that Cambridge scholars had acquired clerical status not later than 1225, the year in which there is the first definite evidence for the Cambridge chancellorship: see A. B. Cobban, *The medieval English universities: Oxford and Cambridge to c.1500* (Berkeley, Calif. & Aldershot, England, University of California Press & Scolar Press, 1988), p. 258.

8. On the difficulties associated with the issue of the first tonsure see R. N. Swanson, *Church and society in late-medieval England* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 41–2.

9. See below, Chapter 6, pp. 183–97: "Relations with the town".

perspective on university education as an essentially male preserve from which women were excluded by dint of their sex and character.

English undergraduates were led to believe that they were privileged members of universities of remarkable antiquity. By the late-medieval period the mythological origins of Oxford and Cambridge had been set in place.<sup>10</sup> Students were doubtless enthralled by tales that Oxford University had been founded either by King Alfred in c.873 or by Greek philosophers in the company of King Brutus and those exiles from Troy who had supposedly instituted British society. Cambridge students thrilled to the myth that their university had been established by a group of Athenian philosophers brought to Cambridge by Prince Cantaber, an exile from Spain who had become the son-in-law of a British king. Charters had been allegedly granted to the university by King Arthur in 531, by King Cadwallader in 681 and by King Edward the Elder in 951.<sup>11</sup> An alternative claim was that the university had been established by Sigebert, king of the East Angles, in the seventh century.<sup>12</sup> Such fables, which were further elaborated by antiquarians between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, were designed not only to argue the competing entitlements to prior antiquity of Oxford and Cambridge but also to convince that both universities were as venerable as any in European history. Indeed, the *Historiola*, an account of the origins of Oxford University that was compiled a.1313, goes so far as to assert that Oxford was the oldest university in the Christian world.<sup>13</sup> Propaganda of this nature coloured and enlivened the environment of English undergraduates and their seniors and gave them a sense of belonging to a glorious tradition of learning that was allegedly unsurpassed anywhere in Europe.

The reality was very different. Oxford was recognized as a fully-fledged university or *studium generale* only towards the close of the twelfth century. Initially, it specialized in arts, civil and canon law, and

10. For the mythological origins of Oxford and Cambridge see Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, pp. 20–6 and notes; J. Parker, *The early history of Oxford 727–1100* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1885); C. H. Cooper (ed.), *Annals of Cambridge* (4 vols) (Cambridge, Warwick, 1842–53), I, pp. 1–3.
11. These spurious charters are printed by G. Dyer (ed.), *The privileges of the University of Cambridge* (2 vols) (London, Longman, 1824), I, pp. 55–8.
12. Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, p. 24; Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, I, p. 2.
13. The *Historiola* is printed by Anstey, *Munimenta academica*, II, pp. 367–9 and by S. Gibson (ed.), *Statuta antiqua universitatis oxoniensis* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1931), pp. 17–19.

theology, and seems to have incorporated medicine as a formal discipline in the late-thirteenth century.<sup>14</sup> As such, Oxford belonged to the primary band of European universities of which Bologna, Paris and Montpellier were the leading luminaries. Cambridge evolved into a university at some point between an exodus from Oxford to Cambridge in 1209 and the early 1220s.<sup>15</sup> Originally, Cambridge concentrated on arts, canon law and theology, faculties of civil law and medicine being added later in the century. Cambridge was ranged with the secondary wave of universities that included Palencia in Castile and the Italian universities of Reggio, Vicenza, Arezzo, Padua and Naples. The University of Naples was founded in 1224 by the Emperor Frederick II and was apparently the first university in Europe to be erected by a specific deed of foundation that did not follow a period of evolutionary growth.<sup>16</sup> It is notable that a country of England's modest size and population had produced two of Europe's early universities. This was insufficient, however, to slake England's patriotic thirst for a dazzling academic heritage. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Hundred Years' War had generated nationalist feelings that found a variety of outlets. Universities across Europe became important founts of either national or regional sentiment. In England the propagandist origins of Oxford and Cambridge made a contribution to a developing sense of national consciousness that is not always acknowledged. Through academic mythology English students were given a fictive historical past that was as prestigious as that for any race in Latin Christendom.

The experience of medieval students depended to some extent on where they lay within the socio-economic spectrum. In the absence of

14. On the evolutionary origins of Oxford see Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, ch. 2; R. W. Southern, "From schools to university", in *The early Oxford schools*, J. I. Catto (ed.), vol. 1 of *The history of the University of Oxford* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 1–36; G. Leff, *Paris and Oxford Universities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries* (New York, John Wiley, 1968), pp. 76–82; H. Rashdall, *The universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (3 vols), 2nd edn, F. M. Powicke & A. B. Emden (eds) (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1936), III, pp. 5–48.
15. See Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, ch. 2; D. R. L. Leader, *The university to 1546*, vol. 1 of *The history of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), ch. 1; M. B. Hackett, *The original statutes of Cambridge University: the text and its history* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970); J. A. Brundage, "The Cambridge faculty of canon law and the ecclesiastical courts of Ely", in *Medieval Cambridge: essays on the pre-Reformation university*, P. Zutshi (ed.) (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Boydell Press, 1993), pp. 21–45.
16. Rashdall, *Universities*, II, p. 22.

state grants, students had to raise the necessary funding for maintenance and tuition fees from private sources, usually from a parent or other relative, or from a guardian or a patron, whether ecclesiastical or lay, who was prepared to act as an academic sponsor. Before the sixteenth century it seems that most students, both in England and in northern Europe, were of middling to lower social condition, although it has to be conceded that the family background of so many students has gone unrecorded. Typically, English undergraduates were the sons of lesser gentry, merchants, artisans, government employees of high and low degree, lawyers, schoolmasters, physicians, and village officials and manorial office-holders such as stewards, bailiffs and reeves. They were also recruited from the more affluent peasant and yeoman families, from the numerous nephews and wards of ecclesiastics, and from the families of urban property-holders of varying wealth and status.<sup>17</sup> If able sons of poor families could not find a local patron, there was the possibility of reaching university as a member of one of the orders of friars. It was not until the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that students of noble birth infiltrated the English universities in sizeable numbers. In the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries sons of the nobility were only a minority presence, and this stands in marked contrast to the substantial colonies of nobles to be found in the academic populations of many of the Italian, French provincial, Spanish and German universities of the medieval period.<sup>18</sup>

The relative paucity of English students of noble birth prior to the late-fifteenth century had important implications for the generality of undergraduates. It meant that their working environment was comparatively innocent of the kind of aristocratic privilege that was such a prevalent feature of Oxford and Cambridge from the Tudor age to the early-twentieth century. Although the medieval student had to confront natural divisions within the university community arising from

17. See Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, p. 302; T. H. Aston, G. D. Duncan & T. A. R. Evans, "The medieval alumni of the University of Cambridge", *Past & Present* 86, 1980, pp. 50-1.

18. See, for example, A. B. Cobban, *The medieval universities: their development and organization* (London, Methuen, 1975), pp. 62, 169, 201-2; J. Verger, *Les universités au moyen âge* (Vendôme, Presses universitaires de France, 1973), pp. 176-87. For the nobility in German universities see J. M. Fletcher, "Wealth and poverty in the medieval German universities", in *Europe in the late Middle Ages*, J. R. Hale, J. R. L. Highfield & B. Smalley (eds) (London, Faber & Faber, 1965), pp. 410-13.

differences of age and intellectual capacity, the hierarchical levels of structure that did exist were not based overmuch upon class. It is true that the companies of friars and monks occupied an elevated position by virtue of their religious calling, maturity and learning, and those few members of the upper gentry and nobility who were in residence represented an obviously privileged element. Generally speaking, however, the world of the English medieval undergraduate was somewhat removed from the rigid class structures that obtained in society at large. To that extent the English universities of pre-sixteenth-century vintage were open-access communities that were designed to accommodate students of ability irrespective of social origins. As long as prospective students were male, had at least minimal finances and a grasp of Latin grammar sufficient to cope with the exigencies of instruction in that language, they would satisfy the vague and unofficial criteria for university entry.<sup>19</sup>

This general accessibility had much to do with the fact that for long decisions about the admission of students were made at the individual level and not by the university as a corporate body. That is to say, in the thirteenth century the acceptance of a student was largely a matter of negotiation with a selected teaching master who would assess the candidate's aptitude for study. If accepted, students would have their names inscribed on the *matricula* or roll of a teaching master. This was in the nature of a contract whereby the undergraduate had to attend the master's ordinary (formal) lectures in the university schools, and in return the master undertook to protect and be responsible for the behaviour of the student.

The earliest English evidence for this form of undergraduate contract or matriculation is found at Oxford in a statute of a.1231 and at Cambridge in a similar statute of between 1236 and 1254.<sup>20</sup> In the case

19. See the discussion by Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, pp. 352-5; R. C. Schwinges, "Admission", in *A history of the university in Europe*, H. de Ridder-Symoens (ed.) (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), I, pp. 171-7.

20. For matriculation arrangements at Oxford see the statute of a.1231 in Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, p. 82, and for later legislation on this subject, pp. 60-1, 83. For matriculation legislation at Cambridge see Hackett, *The original statutes of Cambridge University*, pp. 210-11, with discussion, pp. 72-4; see also *Liber procuratoris antiquus*, Cambridge University Archives, Coll. Admin. 3, fol. 25, and Queen's Commissioners (ed.), *Documents relating to the university and colleges of Cambridge* (3 vols) (London, Longman, 1852), I, p. 332-3 (cited hereafter as *Camb. Docs*).

of Oxford the undergraduate is to be registered with a regent (teaching) master from whom at least one ordinary lecture each day must be heard. At Cambridge the new student is to attend at least three lectures a week given by the regent master on whose roll the undergraduate's name has been inscribed. These two statutes seem to contain the first references to actual matriculation rolls (*rotulus* or *matricula*) within a university context, although the system of matriculation is clearly indicated in the statutes of 1215 granted to Paris University by the papal legate, Robert of Courçon.<sup>21</sup>

An important difference between the two English statutes is that the Cambridge students were allowed the latitude of 15 days from their arrival to enrol with a particular master. The Oxford statute is silent on this point. The Cambridge provision was paralleled at the University of Bologna where new entrants to the joint guild of arts and medicine were empowered, by the statutes of 1405, to experience the teaching of their lecturers for 15 days, without charge, before committing themselves to the courses of specific teaching doctors.<sup>22</sup> In this case, the lecturing staff had to submit to a competitive trial to win the custom of their fee-paying consumers. At Bologna, teaching was viewed as a commodity like any other, and it was logical that new students should sample lecture courses before making their academic purchases. It is unlikely that the sampling process was so closely systematized at Cambridge as at Bologna where students were generally older, more mature and punctilious in defining the contractual obligations of their lecturers. Nevertheless, the generous time allowed to register with a teaching master at Cambridge emphasizes the importance attached to this procedure. Only through matriculation were undergraduates at Oxford and Cambridge recognized as genuine as opposed to false scholars and entitled to enjoy the protective privileges of the university. The inscription of the undergraduate's name in the roll of a specific teaching master was the official proof of affiliation to the university community. This system

21. J. Paquet, *Les matricules universitaires* (Turnhout, Belgium, Brepols, 1992), p. 14. For the Paris statute of 1215 see H. Denifle & E. Chatelain (eds), *Chartularium universitatis Parisiensis* (4 vols) (Paris, Delalain, 1889-97), I, pp. 178-9, trans. in L. Thorndike (ed.), *University records and life in the Middle Ages* (New York, Octagon, 1971), pp. 27-30.
22. C. Malagola (ed.), *Statuti delle università et dei collegi dello studio bolognese* (Bologna, N. Zanichelli, 1888), p. 248. See also A. B. Cobban, "Elective salaried lectureships in the universities of southern Europe in the pre-Reformation era", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67, 1985, p. 684.

was broadly similar throughout continental universities, although there are instances of discrepancy between the statutory provision and actual practice. For example, at the University of Avignon there were law students in the fifteenth century who matriculated only upon taking their bachelor degrees whereas the statutes of 1441 stipulated that students were to matriculate within 30 days of their settlement in the town.<sup>23</sup>

As indicated, the master to whom the English undergraduate was assigned was to serve as teacher, trusted mentor, defender of the student if embroiled in a legal dispute and, before halls, hostels and colleges came into being, probably as supervisor of financial and moral issues as well. Although each registered student attended the lectures of the selected regent master, this did not prevent attendance at the lecture courses of other masters.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it seems that it was possible for undergraduates, at a later stage in the degree course, to change the masters with whom they were initially registered.<sup>25</sup> The process of selection of these particular masters is unclear, but it is likely that the student's relatives or patrons took soundings and played a part in determining the final choice. An instance of this is contained in the letters of the Paston family of Norfolk. When Walter Paston first went up to Oxford, probably early in 1473, Walter's mother, Margaret, arranged that their domestic chaplain should accompany the youth to ensure that the new student was "set in good and sad rule" and that all necessary items were bought.<sup>26</sup> The Oxford chancellor's register of the fifteenth century refers to *tueators* or *creditors* who were mature companions who were sometimes sent to university to keep watch over the affairs of youthful charges from easy social backgrounds.<sup>27</sup> Such companions would ensure that these youths were registered with an appropriate regent master and were suitably accommodated. Clearly, the Paston family's chaplain fits this category exactly.

23. M. Fournier (ed.), *Les statuts et privilèges des universités françaises depuis leur fondation jusqu'en 1789* (3 vols) (Paris, Larose & Forcel, 1890-2), II, p. 424.
24. See the remarks of J. M. Fletcher, "The faculty of arts", in *HUO*, I, p. 373.
25. *ibid.*
26. N. Davis (ed.), *Paston letters and papers of the fifteenth century* (2 vols) (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971-6), I, p. 370; H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 106.
27. H. E. Salter (ed.), *Registrum cancellarii oxoniensis 1434-1469* (2 vols), Oxford Historical Society 93, 94 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932), I, pp. xxx, 321; II, p. 43.

The responsibility of regent masters to maintain their own rolls of *bona fide* students, apparently as their personal property, absolved the English university chancellors from compiling centralized registers for more than three hundred years. An Oxford statute of *a.*1275 required regent masters to read out the names on their rolls publicly in their schools at the beginning of each term, and to do so a further three times within each term.<sup>28</sup> These rolls have not survived with the possible exception of what may be a roll of a Cambridge regent master of *a.*1268 that is preserved among the manuscripts of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.<sup>29</sup> By a royal statute of 1420 Oxford undergraduates had to appear before the chancellor within a month of entry to swear an oath to observe the statutes relating to keeping the peace.<sup>30</sup> There is here still no mention of a general university register, although by this date principals of halls presumably kept lists of their members. It was not until 1544 at Cambridge and 1565 at Oxford that centralized university matriculation was instituted by statute.<sup>31</sup>

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when endowed halls at Oxford and the equivalent hostels at Cambridge became the usual mode of residence for undergraduates, decisions about admissions were transferred to the principals of these establishments. During the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the endowed secular college came to absorb most English students, although, exceptionally, the royal College of the King's Hall, Cambridge, and New College, Oxford, had admitted undergraduates as fellows from the fourteenth century.<sup>32</sup> With

28. Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, pp. 60–1.

29. Hackett, *Original statutes of Cambridge University*, p. 167.

30. Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, pp. 226–7.

31. For the Cambridge matriculation registers see H. E. Peek & C. P. Hall, *The archives of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 30–1. For Oxford's first matriculation register, extending from 1565 to 1615, see W. A. Pantin, *Oxford life in Oxford archives* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 3–4. For a discussion of the value of the Oxford matriculation registers as historical sources see L. Stone, "The size and composition of the Oxford student body 1580–1910", in *The university in society* (2 vols), L. Stone (ed.) (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1975), I, pp. 12–15.

32. For English colleges, halls and hostels, see, for example, Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, ch. 4, and Cobban, "Colleges and halls 1380–1500", in *Late medieval Oxford*, J. I. Catto & T. A. R. Evans (eds), vol. 2 of *HUO* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 581–633. For the King's Hall see A. B. Cobban, *The King's Hall within the University of Cambridge in the later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969).

the general supersession of halls and hostels by secular colleges, it was a logical progression that collegiate heads would have the lion's share in admissions. Candidates who had influential friends or patrons or contacts at either Oxford or Cambridge would more easily gain access to the hall or hostel or college of first choice. Strong connections developed between many families and particular colleges. For example, a family of college tenants at Newton Longueville, Buckinghamshire, sent members to New College in 1480, 1510, 1525 and 1528.<sup>33</sup> There are several examples of fathers and sons who attended Queens' College, Cambridge, in the sixteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, certain Oxford colleges gave first preference for entry to founder's kin.<sup>35</sup> This preferential system for kinsmen was originated by Walter of Merton at Merton College in *c.*1262–4. It was imitated in the fourteenth century by Robert of Eglesfield and William of Wykeham, founders of Queen's College and New College in 1341 and 1379 respectively, and by Archbishop Chichele, founder of All Souls in 1437.<sup>36</sup> Although members of founder's kin were present in some profusion at Merton College, they were far less in evidence at the other colleges where the concept of founder's kinsmen had been introduced. At New College, for instance, there were only six admissions under founder's kin by the time of Wykeham's

For New College see R. L. Storey, "The foundation and the medieval college 1379–1530", in *New College 1379–1979*, J. Buxton & P. Williams (eds) (Oxford, Warden & Fellows of New College, 1979), pp. 3–43, and G. F. Lytle, "The social origins of Oxford students in the late Middle Ages: New College, *c.*1380–*c.*1510", in *The universities in the late Middle Ages*, J. Isewijn & J. Paquet (eds) (Louvain, Belgium, Louvain University Press, 1978), pp. 426–54.

33. G. F. Lytle, *Oxford students and English society c.1300–c.1510* (PhD thesis, Department of History, Princeton University, 1975), p. 42. See also A. B. Emden, *A biographical register of the University of Oxford to AD 1500* (3 vols) (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957–9), III, p. 2135 (cited hereafter as *BRUO*); A. B. Emden, *A biographical register of the University of Oxford AD 1501 to 1540* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 652.

34. J. Twigg, *A history of Queens' College, Cambridge, 1448–1986* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Boydell Press, 1987), p. 87.

35. The main study of founder's kin is by G. D. Squibb, *Founder's kin: privilege and pedigree* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972). See also Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, pp. 135–7.

36. For founder's kin at Merton see the statutes in Queen's Commissioners (ed.), *Statutes of the colleges of Oxford* (3 vols) (Oxford & London, Parker & Longmans, 1853), I, ch. 2, p. 6 (code of 1264), p. 17 (code of 1270), p. 36 (code of 1274); for Queen's see *ibid.*, I, ch. 4, p. 12; for New College see *ibid.*, I, ch. 5, p. 5; for All Souls see *ibid.*, I, ch. 7, pp. 21–2 (cited hereafter as *Statutes*).

death in 1404, and only six more were admitted in the next half century.<sup>37</sup>

The system of founder's kin was not reproduced as such at Cambridge. This is rather surprising, but many colleges at both Oxford and Cambridge were the recipients of "engrafted" places. That is to say, benefactors founded scholarships or fellowships in an existing college, and these were wholly or partially for the benefit of kinsmen. The earliest instance of "engrafting" is to be found at Merton College where John Wylliot, Chancellor of Exeter Cathedral, provided endowments in c.1370-80 for several poor scholars or portionists, later called postmasters.<sup>38</sup> In selecting the portionists, who were to study arts, first preference was to be given to Wylliot's kinsmen. "Engrafting" in colleges was only sparingly resorted to before 1500 but became common from the sixteenth century onwards. For example, at St John's College, Cambridge, five scholarships were founded by John Dowman, Archdeacon of Suffolk, in 1526, preference being accorded to kinsmen born in Yorkshire and having the same surname.<sup>39</sup> At the same college Roger Lupton, Provost of Eton, founded six scholarships in 1527 with first preference assigned to kinsmen bearing the Lupton name.<sup>40</sup>

Just as many colleges had close contacts with particular dioceses or counties where they owned land or from where they received benefactions, so several unendowed Oxford halls had links with ethnic groupings or geographical areas. It seems that Welsh students were much in evidence at Brend, Gloucester, Haberdash, Hincksey (Hinxe), St Edward, St George, Stock and Trillmill Halls. Aristotle Hall in Logic Lane was perhaps most popular with Irish scholars but they also frequented, among others, Heron (Eagle), Vine, Coventry and Beef Halls. In the early fourteenth century scholars from southwest England favoured St Edmund Hall, and scholars from Kent probably had an attachment to Great Lion Hall in the late-fourteenth century.<sup>41</sup> There is no comparable

37. Squibb, *Founder's kin*, p. 35; Storey, "The foundation and the medieval college", p. 31; G. F. Lytle, "Patronage and the election of Winchester scholars during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance", in *Winchester College: sixth-century essays*, R. Custance (ed.) (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 169.

38. Squibb, *Founder's kin*, pp. 14, 136.

39. *ibid.*, p. 150.

40. *ibid.*

41. See R. W. Hays, "Welsh students at Oxford and Cambridge universities in the Middle Ages", *Welsh Historical Review* 4, 1968-9, p. 330; J. I. Catto, "Citizens, scholars and

evidence of special links with the Cambridge hostels. Welsh, Irish and Scottish students were much less numerous at Cambridge than at Oxford, and no hostel has been particularly connected with racial groupings.

The King's Hall, Cambridge, and New College, Oxford, were the only colleges to admit significant numbers of undergraduates as foundation members before the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>42</sup> It is true that several other colleges had a few incorporated undergraduate members as distinct from poor grammar boys. These included, at Oxford, Balliol, Exeter and All Souls. Merton College had special categories of scholars in the form of the boys of Walter of Merton's kin, the poor secondary scholars and Wylliot's portionists. In some respects these groups were similar to undergraduates who were foundation members, although they lived in premises external to the college and they were eligible for election as scholars only after acquiring the status of bachelor of arts. Moreover, the Benedictine establishment, Canterbury College, founded at Oxford in 1363, had, by 1384, made arrangements for the maintenance of five poor, secular undergraduates who were to be supported for a minimum of seven years. During that time they were to study arts, with one or two being permitted to go on to study civil law. They were also to give assistance in the chapel and to the monk-fellows. It was assumed that they would eventually enter the secular clergy or join a religious order. It is of considerable interest that several colleges had a small undergraduate presence at a time when colleges were mainly postgraduate institutions.<sup>43</sup> There is, however, no doubt that of the English colleges only the King's Hall and New College had substantial colonies of undergraduate fellows or probationary fellows before c.1450. This pattern was radically altered with the foundation of King's College, Cambridge, in 1441, and Magdalen College, Oxford, established in 1458.

The founder of King's College, Henry VI, arranged for a complement of 70 fellows and undergraduate scholars. The scholars were to

masters", in *HUO*, I, p. 179; M. H. Somers, *Irish scholars in the universities at Paris and Oxford before 1500* (PhD thesis, Department of History, City University of New York, 1979), p. 24.

42. Cobban, *The King's Hall*, ch. 2; Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, pp. 118-19; Storey, "The foundation and the medieval college", pp. 6-7.

43. For undergraduates at Balliol, Exeter, All Souls, Merton and Canterbury College see A. B. Cobban, "Colleges and halls 1380-1500", in *HUO*, II, pp. 591-2 and notes.

be admitted from the twin foundation, Eton College, and they were to be aged between 15 and 20 years. After three years of probation the undergraduate scholars could be received as fellows.<sup>44</sup> William Waynflete, the founder of Magdalen College, made provision in the statutes of c.1480–2 for 30 undergraduate members who were called demies because they were granted only half of the fellows' allowance in commons. The demies could properly be termed undergraduates. They were to be at least 12 years of age, could continue until the age of 25 and were to be taught grammar, logic and sophistry, although they had to prove their competence in grammar before advancing to their other subjects. The demies were neither fellows nor probationary fellows as were the incorporated undergraduates at the King's Hall and New College. It was possible, however, for demies to be promoted to fellowships, a practice that was very sparingly exercised before 1500.<sup>45</sup> Following the example of King's and Magdalen, most of the English colleges, both the old-established and the new, gradually came to admit undergraduates. In the sixteenth century the colleges emerged as the natural venues for undergraduates as a result of the phased decline and eventual disappearance of most of the halls and hostels.

Although New College and the King's Hall were comparable in terms of their large undergraduate constituencies, they had diametrically opposed recruitment policies. At New College undergraduates were to be selected from scholars who had been at the twin foundation of Winchester College for at least a year. They were to be admitted for a probationary period of two years, after which they would normally proceed to full fellowships. Preference was given first to founder's kin, secondly to inhabitants of the parishes where New College and Winchester had property, and thirdly to natives of the counties of Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Middlesex, Dorset, Kent, Sussex and Cambridgeshire in that order. If the complement of scholars could not be filled from these preferred categories, they

44. J. Saltmarsh, "King's College", in *Victoria history of the county of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely*. Volume 3, J. P. C. Roach (ed.) (London, Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 382–3; *Camb. Docs*, II, pp. 482–3.

45. *Statutes*, II, ch. 8, pp. 5–6, 15–17; N. Denholm-Young, "Magdalen College", in *Victoria history of the county of Oxford*. Volume 3, H. E. Salter & M. Lobel (eds) (London, Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 194; V. Davis, *William Waynflete: bishop and educationist* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Boydell Press, 1993), pp. 82–3.

could be recruited from other parts of the kingdom.<sup>46</sup> Of the 804 undergraduates who are known to have proceeded to New College between c.1390 and c.1510, 238 were recruited from Winchester diocese, 220 from Salisbury diocese, 140 from Lincoln diocese, 79 from the dioceses of Bath and Wells and 63 from London diocese. The remaining dioceses in England and Wales furnished a total of 64 scholars.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, New College relied heavily upon the southern half of England for its undergraduate admissions. This is in broad accord with what is imperfectly known of Oxford University's overall recruitment. Oxford's main intake seems to have derived from the counties of the southwest, the northern dioceses of Carlisle, Durham and York, and the region of the west Midlands.

In contrast, the statutes of the King's Hall, Cambridge, of 1380 did not stipulate preferred areas of recruitment for its undergraduate fellows. Uniquely, this college had its origins as an offshoot of the royal household of Edward II when the king sent a clerk and 12 children of the chapel royal to be educated at Cambridge. At first they lived in rented premises as the Society of the King's Scholars. In 1337 Edward III converted this Society into the endowed College of the King's Hall. Both the Society of the King's Scholars and the later King's Hall were designed to an appreciable degree to provide trained personnel for the royal household and the various departments of government. This is why successive English kings from Edward II to Henry VIII found it politic to retain a direct supervision over the patronage of the college. Alone among English colleges, every fellow of the King's Hall, including the undergraduate fellows, was appointed individually by the king by writ of privy seal. In this matter English kings may have been influenced by arrangements at many of the Parisian colleges where founders assigned the patronage to an external body such as an archbishop, bishop, the head of a religious house or a group of university officers. Until the early-fifteenth century the King's Hall was supplied with a regular stream of youths or clerks from the chapel royal who were given the status of undergraduate fellows. After the first quarter of the fifteenth century, however, direct recruitment from the chapel

46. *Statutes*, I, ch. 5, pp. 4–7.

47. Lytle, "The social origins of Oxford students", p. 430 and Lytle, "Patronage and the election of Winchester scholars", p. 186.



royal appears to have dwindled, although links with the court and royal household continued until the dissolution of the college in 1546.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from recruitment from the chapel royal, the writs of privy seal for the appointment of undergraduate fellows reveal that, in the fourteenth century, the King's Hall provided an outlet for royal patronage in favour of superior and inferior household and court officials and high-ranking patrons who had government connections. For example, in 1349 Thomas of Wodeweston was nominated for a vacancy at the King's Hall at the request of the Earl of Lancaster along with Thomas, son of Walter the Smith, on the petition of Sir John Darcy, in recognition of Walter's services at the Tower of London. In the same year William, son of William Walkelate, king's sergeant at arms, was nominated on the supplication of Walkelate the elder, as was William of Walcote on the recommendation of Isabella, widow of the deposed Edward II. Nominations to vacancies at the college were also made in favour of Robert Nicole, cousin of Helmyng Leget, king's esquire and governor of Windsor Castle, Richard Lunteleye, cousin to the Bishop of Llandaff, confessor to Richard II, and John Cacheroo at the request of the confessor to the Duke of Ireland, in 1369, 1385 and 1387 respectively.<sup>49</sup>

Although the King's Hall recruited from all parts of England, the main intake was from the eastern counties north of the Thames, with Norfolk seemingly supplying more than any other county and closely followed by Yorkshire. The bias towards the eastern and northern counties at the King's Hall reflects what appears to be a similar recruitment pattern for Cambridge University as a whole.<sup>50</sup> In a purely geographical sense the English universities were regional rather than national in orientation. The southeast of England was apparently a low area for

48. For these features of the King's Hall see Cobban, *The King's Hall*, chs 1, 2, 5. The last known recruit from the chapel royal was John Fisser who was admitted on 3 December 1417 and vacated on 7 July 1432: *ibid.*, p. 188.

49. For Wodeweston, Thomas, son of Walter the Smith, Walkelate and Walcote see writs of privy seal of 11 March 1349, 30 November 1349, 1 February 1350 and 18 May 1350, Public Record Office, E101/348/4. For Nicole, Lunteleye and Cacheroo see writs of privy seal of 10 November 1369, 27 May 1385 and 8 February 1387, PRO E101/348/12/16/17.

50. For geographical recruitment patterns at the King's Hall see Cobban, *The King's Hall*, pp. 157–60. For geographical recruitment patterns to Cambridge University see Aston, Duncan & Evans, "The medieval alumni of the University of Cambridge", pp. 28–36, and A. B. Emden, *A biographical register of the University of Cambridge to 1500* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. xxvi–vii (cited hereafter as BRUC).

recruitment for both Oxford and Cambridge, which is curious given the region's impressive resources of wealth and population. The significant intakes from the south of England by colleges such as New College, Oxford, and King's College, Cambridge, must have provided some corrective to the meagre level of admissions from the southeast to their respective universities. Even so, that the southeast provided only a limited supply of personnel for Oxford and Cambridge in the medieval period is a matter that is both surprising and hard to explain.

Illegitimacy does not seem to have been a major bar to university entry. One or two English colleges such as Balliol and All Souls College, Oxford, whose statutes of 1443 envisaged a few advanced undergraduates, did indeed exclude illegitimate entrants.<sup>51</sup> The general attitude, however, appears to have been one of tolerance. For example, Henry, son and heir of the Earl of Huntingdon, along with two bastard brothers, John and William, lived in the King's Hall as undergraduate commoners from 1439 to 1442.<sup>52</sup> In the fourteenth century John of Stirkeland referred to the death of a bastard son, Robert, who, 18 years previously, had been "killed by mischance" in the schools at Oxford.<sup>53</sup> William of Doune, who became a notary public in 1340, was of illegitimate birth and acquired degrees in arts and civil law at Oxford and, for a time, was in the employ of John of Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, who granted William episcopal licence to continue study at Oxford between 1345 and 1349.<sup>54</sup> It has been reckoned that there were about 40 illegitimate sons at Oxford in the fourteenth century and just over 60 in the fifteenth century.<sup>55</sup> If these figures are in any way reliable, they suggest that student illegitimacy was of marginal concern at Oxford. The percentage of illegitimate students, although clearly small, cannot be determined because overall student numbers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can only be a matter of broad estimate.<sup>56</sup> At some continental universities proof of legitimacy was at least a theoretical condition of entry. A declaration that one was legitimate would often

51. *Statutes*, I, ch. 1, p. 6; ch. 7, p. 20.

52. Cobban, *The King's Hall*, pp. 75–6.

53. *Calendar of inquisitions post mortem. Volume 8* (London, Fisher Unwin, 1913), p. 35.

54. Emden, *BRUC*, I, pp. 587–8. See also C. R. Cheney, *Notaries public in England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 46–7.

55. Lytle, *Oxford students and English society*, p. 43.

56. See the discussion by T. A. R. Evans, "The number, origins and careers of scholars", in *HUO*, II, pp. 485–90.

suffice. Moreover, some universities required this affirmation of legitimacy only if the student wished to take a degree.<sup>57</sup>

The situation regarding the admission, number and subsequent treatment of English unfree students is wrapped in some obscurity. In general, unfree tenants were forbidden to send their sons to schools without the lord's permission and the purchase of an enabling licence.<sup>58</sup> This restriction on the education of villeins probably lessened in the course of the fifteenth century, and in some parts of the country it may have lapsed altogether. The attitude of the English universities towards unfree students was seemingly mixed. The statutes of All Souls College of 1443 enacted that all entrants had to be of free condition.<sup>59</sup> Many sets of college statutes do not raise the issue. In truth, very few English university students of unfree status can be positively identified. It is clear, however, that unfree status was considered to be a tainted condition and one that was not fully compatible with the academic life. This prevailing attitude prompted unfree scholars to seek manumission as soon as possible. For instance, Robert of He(i)ghington, a fellow of Merton and of villein status, acquired letters of manumission from the Bishop of Durham in 1312. Sometimes false accusations of servile origin were levied against a scholar who was obliged to obtain documentary proof of free status. A case in point is that of an Oxford scholar, Richard Stoketon, who acquired letters in 1343 from the Prior of Durham testifying that Richard's father was a freeman.<sup>60</sup> Apart from causing a measure of embarrassment and discrimination, the topic of servile origin does not appear to have loomed very large at medieval Oxford and Cambridge. The statutes of the faculty of arts of 1389 of Vienna University debarred from taking the master's degree not only unfree students but also those who had been manumitted.<sup>61</sup> This seems to be more discriminatory than anything to be found in the English universities.

57. Schwinges, "Admission", p. 171.

58. Orme, *English schools*, pp. 50-1.

59. *Statutes*, I, ch. 7, p. 20.

60. For Robert or Walter of He(i)ghington see Emden, *BRUO*, II, p. 903; A. F. Leach, *Educational charters and documents 598 to 1909* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1911), p. 270, and Lytle, *Oxford students and English society*, p. 144. For Robert Stoketon see Emden, *BRUO*, III, p. 1786 and Lytle, *Oxford students*, p. 144.

61. J. Paquet, "Recherches sur l'universitaire 'pauvre' au moyen âge", *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 66, 1978, p. 344.

As with illegitimacy and unfree status, there was no uniform perspective on physical handicap as a determinant for English university entry. There are occasional statutory rulings in English colleges whereby students are refused admittance on physical grounds. According to the earliest surviving statutes of New College of 1400 no scholar, including undergraduate members, was to be admitted who had either an incurable disease or grave bodily deformity, both conditions that would preclude holy orders.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, there was obviously no objection to the admission to Oxford of students of exceptionally small stature. In the mid-fifteenth century two students who were about to determine as bachelors were allowed to do so in their own halls, instead of in the public schools, because of the embarrassment occasioned by their diminutive height.<sup>63</sup> An inspirational case from continental Europe is that of Nicasius Voerda, who had been blind since childhood and who entered the University of Louvain in 1459, qualified in arts and theology, and enrolled at the University of Cologne in 1489 and acquired a doctoral degree in canon law.<sup>64</sup>

There was no commonly prescribed age as a criterion of entry to the medieval English universities or indeed to universities across Europe. To a large extent this stemmed from the absence of formal entrance qualifications for universities in the medieval period. At the University of Bologna many law students, who had already experienced an advanced arts education, were aged between 20 and 25, and some were on the borders of 30 upon entry. It was not unusual for law students of this type, many of whom were wealthy and some were of noble birth, to have held ecclesiastical or secular office prior to their affiliation to the university.<sup>65</sup> By comparison with their university equivalents at Bologna and at universities in southern Europe generally, English undergraduates were usually less mature, less socially elevated and less experienced in worldly affairs. It is not possible, however, to state with any precision when most English students embarked upon their university studies. It is true that young boys were often present in the English universities

62. *Statutes*, I, ch. 7, p. 7.

63. J. M. Fletcher, "The teaching of arts at Oxford, 1400-1520", *Paedagogica Historica* 7, 1967, p. 443.

64. Schwinges, "Admission", p. 172.

65. See, for example, A. B. Cobban, "Medieval student power", *Past & Present* 53, 1971, pp. 38-9, and Cobban, *The medieval universities: their development and organization*, pp. 61-2.

and at Paris but not all of them were undergraduates. Some of them were attending grammar schools within the town with a view to raising their standards of Latin grammar to a point where they had the confidence to commence the university course in arts. At Paris several of the colleges catered for such advanced schoolboys as one of their resident categories. For example, the Ave Maria College received grammar students in their eighth or ninth year.<sup>66</sup> Oxford university statutes of the medieval period did not stipulate a minimum age of entry. The unofficial collection of early statutes and written customs for Cambridge, dating apparently from the mid-thirteenth century, is likewise silent on this matter. However, the late-fourteenth-century Cambridge statutes prescribe 14 years as the youngest age for admission. This, according to canon law, was the minimum age for taking an oath.<sup>67</sup> The statutes of 1215 of Robert of Courçon for Paris University also give a commencement age for the arts faculty of 14 years or even younger.<sup>68</sup>

English colleges occasionally stipulated entry ages and two that did so were the King's Hall and New College which, as previously mentioned, had large undergraduate intakes from their inception in the fourteenth century. The statutes of the King's Hall of 1380 set the minimum entry age at 14 years, and those of New College of 1400 insisted that new entrants had completed their fifteenth year.<sup>69</sup> The average age of entrants at New College seems to have been higher than the statutory minimum, and it has been reckoned that, in the fifteenth century, it may have been in the region of 17 years.<sup>70</sup> At least three members of the Paston family of Norfolk were quite young when studying at Cambridge in the fifteenth century. John Paston was at Trinity Hall from the age of 15 or 16 until 20 or 21 years of age. It is probable that two of John's brothers were at Cambridge when only

66. On youths at the English universities and at Paris who had not yet embarked upon the arts course see E. F. Jacob, *Essays in the conciliar epoch*, 2nd edn (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1953), p. 210, and Jacob, "English university clerks in the later Middle Ages: the problem of maintenance", *BJRL* 29, 1946, p. 308; A. L. Gabriel, *Garlandia: studies in the history of the medieval university* (Frankfurt, Knecht, 1969), pp. 97-124.

67. *Camb. Docs*, I, p. 337.

68. *Chartularium universitatis Parisiensis*, I, p. 78; Thorndike, *University records*, p. 28.

69. See the statutes of the King's Hall in W. W. Rouse Ball, *The King's Scholars and King's Hall* (Cambridge, privately printed, 1917), p. 67; also Cobban, *The King's Hall*, p. 59. For New College see *Statutes*, I, ch. 5, p. 7.

70. Lytle, *Oxford students*, pp. 189, 190.

13 and 15 respectively.<sup>71</sup> As a result of the expansion in the availability of pre-university education through the establishment of many new grammar schools in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the ages of English students in the later-medieval period may well have become less diverse than in the thirteenth century. The average age may even have fallen in the first half of the sixteenth century. Another consideration is that the length of degree courses varied from university to university. This created divergencies in the age profiles of undergraduates pursuing similar courses in different universities. While no exactitude is possible, a suggested average entry age for English students of between 15 and 17 years is not perhaps too misleading.

In England, as in continental Europe, students arrived at university with very diverse educational attainments. There was no standardized educational system to prepare pupils for university entry. Exceptional schools, such as Winchester and Eton, were designed as feeder agencies for New College at Oxford and King's College at Cambridge. Most English schools, however, appear to have functioned independently of university criteria. The idea of a phased educational system where pupils progressed from elementary stages to the pinnacle of university entry is one wholly at odds with the unschematic nature of medieval English education. Indeed, it was possible to attend a medieval university without any prior formal tuition. Such instances were probably infrequent, but private tuition of good quality, lay or clerical, was a valuable supplement to school instruction for those pupils who belonged to families with the requisite resources.

The late-fourteenth-century statutes of the University of Perpignan, then in the Kingdom of Aragon, contain the disconcerting decree that all new entrants were to matriculate, including those who did not know how to write.<sup>72</sup> The Latin used makes it clear that, in this instance, the inability to write was not owing to physical handicap but to the lack of writing skill. This statutory provision may have resulted from the need to legislate for every eventuality, however remote, or it may have been formulated to draw attention to a real, if exceptional problem. This is not an isolated case. In 1455 the University of Vienna set up a commission to enquire into the state of a house of students, and it declared

71. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England*, p. 103.

72. Fournier, *Les statuts et privilèges*, II, p. 660.

that a large proportion of them did not know how to write.<sup>73</sup> It is apparent that these were students engaged upon degree courses, not children of tender years. The statutes of the University of Heidelberg of 1466 refer to students who did not know how to write and so could not take lecture notes. They were advised to listen in silence and without disturbing other students.<sup>74</sup> The Hungarian palaeographer and historian, I. Hajnal, assumed that students of this kind at Heidelberg would not be entirely illiterate but would be unable to write with any fluency, an interpretation that goes beyond the actual wording of the statutory provision. Even if a student could be admitted to a Spanish or German university with little or no writing ability, it is unlikely that this situation was paralleled in medieval England.

While a fair percentage of the English population possessed reading skills, it is true that far fewer of the laity had a mastery of writing.<sup>75</sup> Historians give widely differing estimates of lay literacy in England in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is general agreement, however, that literacy rates expanded throughout the entire social structure in these centuries.<sup>76</sup> Gentry and aristocratic families often employed professional scribes, secretaries or domestic chaplains to deal with correspondence. Writing was viewed as a professional activity and was doubtless so regarded by England's student population. Evidence for this is the fact that English students made extensive use of the formularies of model letters, compiled by professional writers or *dictatores*, that could be adapted quickly to a student's particular business. That English students preferred in the main to use model epistles that were in effect exercises in written rhetoric rather than devoting energy to composing original letters is by no means a sign that they were inexperienced in the art of writing. They simply wished to take advantage of the persuasive skills of the practitioners of rhetoric.

It is almost certain that potential English students, who were the product of either a school education or private tuition or both, would have acquired capable writing accomplishments. It is extremely unlikely that any English aspirant for university entry who was wholly

73. I. Hajnal, *L'enseignement de l'écriture aux universités médiévales*, 2nd edn (Budapest, Académie des Sciences de Hongrie, 1959), p. 65.

74. *ibid.*, p. 64.

75. See, for example, Moran, *The growth of English schooling*, p. 18.

76. *ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

deficient in the craft of writing would have been accepted. There is nowhere any suggestion of such a possibility in either English university or college statutes. In furtherance of this is the consideration that undergraduates could supplement their incomes through scribal activities. At Oxford it is probable that undergraduates engaged with stationers in the town to copy portions of the academic texts that were being studied in the university schools, payment being made as each piece or portion of text was copied.<sup>77</sup> The obsessive claims of the Hungarian scholar, I. Hajnal, that the elementary teaching of grammar and writing was a fundamental preoccupation of the English and all other medieval universities is a distortion that cannot be substantiated with reference to any body of convincing evidence.<sup>78</sup>

When undergraduates began to infiltrate English colleges, significantly from the late-fifteenth century, they became subject to close screening at the point of collegiate entry. Exceptionally, this had already been the case in the fourteenth century at the King's Hall, Cambridge, and at New College, Oxford, because of their substantial undergraduate cohorts.<sup>79</sup> Detailed assessments were certainly carried out for undergraduate entrants at King's College, Cambridge, and at Magdalen College, Oxford, in the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>80</sup> Entry to Oxford halls and Cambridge hostels doubtless involved some form of academic assessment. Whether or not this was of a probing or perfunctory nature cannot be determined from available evidence. What is very clear is that when the undergraduate population transferred piecemeal from the unendowed halls and hostels to the colleges there was much improvement in the scrutiny of new entrants.

The lack of a centralized admissions policy at Oxford and Cambridge before the sixteenth century was patently one of the reasons for the high undergraduate wastage rate in England in the Middle Ages.

77. See G. Pollard, "The *pecia* system in the medieval universities", in *Medieval scribes, manuscripts and libraries: essays presented to N. R. Ker, M. B. Parkes & A. G. Watson* (eds) (London, Scolar Press, 1978), p. 156.

78. Hajnal's ideas are expounded at length in *L'enseignement de l'écriture aux universités médiévales*, ch. 3.

79. For screening at the King's Hall see the statutes of 1380 in Rouse Ball, *The King's Scholars and King's Hall*, p. 67, and for the emphasis placed on a training in grammar for new entrants to New College see *Statutes*, I, ch. 5, pp. 5–6.

80. For details of the selection of undergraduate scholars at King's College see *Camb. Docs*, II, pp. 484–92, and for the scrutiny of the qualifications of Magdalen's undergraduate demies see *Statutes*, II, ch. 8, pp. 15–16.

However, an important distinction has to be drawn between modern and medieval attitudes towards the attainment of degrees. The modern idea that a student who leaves university without obtaining a degree has contributed to the failure rate within that university is not one that easily transfers to a medieval context. Many students attended a medieval university without having the intention of acquiring a degree. They believed that a period of study at a university, as well as being an education in itself, would bring social and career advancement. A university education did not have to be crowned with the winning of an academic title for it to be perceived as having an intrinsic value. From the evidence of model testimonial letters it seems that such a spell of study at a university that did not entail a degree could be put forward with confidence in support of an application for employment.<sup>81</sup> University education in England was a deregulated activity, a form of private enterprise that owed little to state intervention beyond the provision of a framework of royal privileges that facilitated university development in a protected environment. University learning was encouraged through royal, aristocratic and ecclesiastical patronage, but it was not mandatory for any section of society. It was left to individuals and their families or guardians to decide if a university education was a valuable asset in terms of self-fulfilment or positive career advantage. If the answer was in the affirmative, a further decision had to be taken about the desirability or otherwise of aiming for a degree qualification. On impressionistic grounds it has been suggested that possibly more than half of medieval English undergraduates did not acquire a degree.<sup>82</sup> At the King's Hall there are instances of fellows who remained for periods of 20, 30, 40 and even 50 years without progressing beyond undergraduate status. The most extreme case is that of Robert (or Hugh) Lincoln who resided in the college from 1382 until death intervened in 1440 without obtaining any degree.<sup>83</sup>

Whether a degree was sought or not, some unfortunate students had to terminate their studies prematurely. In the absence of matriculation

81. Catto, "Citizens, scholars and masters", p. 190; H. E. Salter, W. A. Pantin & H. G. Richardson (eds), *Formularies which bear on the history of Oxford c.1204-1420* (2 vols), Oxford Historical Society, new ser. 4, 5 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1942), II, pp. 400-1, 465-6.

82. Aston, Duncan & Evans, "The medieval alumni of the University of Cambridge", p. 27; Evans, "The number, origins and careers of scholars", p. 497.

83. Cobban, *The King's Hall*, p. 56.

registers and accurate and complete degree lists, it is not possible to quantify student wastage at medieval Oxford and Cambridge. Nevertheless, detailed figures for wastage are available for New College, Oxford, and they give a graphic illustration of the scale of the problem. It has been reckoned that of 1,350 scholars recorded at New College between 1386 and 1547 about a third left prematurely, and many of these had not attained a degree. Moreover, of the 254 scholars who died in the college during this period 124 of them were undergraduates.<sup>84</sup> R. L. Storey has calculated that between 1386 and 1540 one in seven undergraduate scholars left before the expiry of the two probationary years required for election to a fellowship.<sup>85</sup>

New College was a magnificently appointed college, and all undergraduate entrants who transferred from the feeder school of Winchester had been rigorously examined on their competence in Latin grammar. If some undergraduate scholars of New College, who had benefited from a sound preparatory education at Winchester, found difficulties in coping with the early stages of the arts course, it is understandable that youths with fewer educational advantages would experience even greater problems in adapting to university study. Some would become disenchanted with academic life and decide to leave for fresh pastures. Others would soon realize that the stringencies of university study exceeded their abilities, and they would give up the unequal struggle. While individual masters may have given extra tuition to students in difficulties, Oxford and Cambridge, as corporate bodies, did not assume liability for the progress of their undergraduates after the manner of a modern university. They were not held accountable for the success or failure of their members. The guilds of masters provided the educational opportunity and the mechanisms for learning, and beyond this the responsibility for success or otherwise lay entirely with the student. However youthful some of the students may have been, they were treated as adults who were capable of making the important choices governing their sojourn at university.

Apart from loss of commitment, lack of ability, insufficient self-discipline, illness, death or the decision to make a career change, it is undeniable that some undergraduates had to terminate their studies

84. A. H. M. Jones, "New College", in *Victoria history of the county of Oxford. Volume 3*, p. 158.

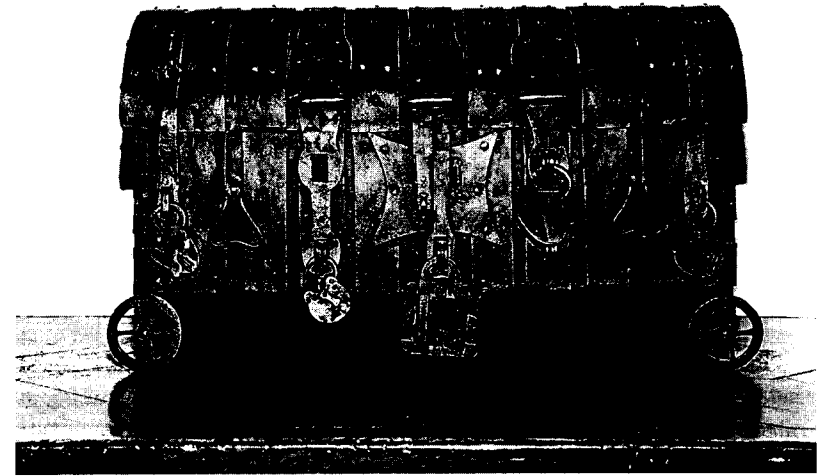
85. Storey, "The foundation and the medieval college", pp. 17-18.

through financial exigency. If students had exhausted their monetary supplies and family members could not or would not send assistance, there were few alternatives but to withdraw from the university. In the thirteenth century undergraduates could take out loans from the Jewish moneylenders who were established in the towns of Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>86</sup> A security for a loan was required, and this sometimes took the form of a book. Not too many undergraduates of restricted means would have had such a pledge at their disposal. This borrowing option ceased with the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290. In any case, those students who were disadvantaged financially would scarcely have been able to meet the high rate of interest charged on loans, although at Oxford some attempt was made to limit interest rates by royal edict. There is no known limitation on chargeable rates at Cambridge.

It may be thought that the many loan-chests that were established by benefactors at Oxford and Cambridge would have helped to alleviate students in the most straitened of circumstances.<sup>87</sup> By the early-sixteenth century Cambridge had about 15 university loan-chests and about a dozen collegiate chests as well as several administrative chests for the storage of valuables. Oxford had at least 21 university loan-chests and various administrative chests by 1511. These medieval loan-chests were in the nature of pawnshops that were endowed so that interest-free loans could be made to members of the academic community. The problem was that loan-chests were only of limited value for needy undergraduates. In order to secure a loan a pledge such as a manuscript, an item of plate, a candlestick, a piece of jewellery, a decorated belt, a vestment, a rosary, a cross and even an astrolabe had

86. On Jewish moneylenders at Oxford see C. Roth, *The Jews of medieval Oxford*, Oxford Historical Society, new ser. 9 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1951), pp. 126–50; also T. H. Aston & R. Faith, “The endowments of the university and colleges to c.1348”, in *HUO*, I, pp. 274–5; M. B. Parkes, “The provision of books”, in *ibid.*, II, p. 410.

87. For Oxford’s loan-chests see Aston & Faith, “The endowments of the university and colleges”, pp. 274–87 and G. Pollard, “The loan-chests”, in *The register of congregation 1448–1463*, W. A. Pantin & W. T. Mitchell (eds), Oxford Historical Society, new ser. 22 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 418–20. For Cambridge loan-chests see Pollard, “Medieval loan-chests at Cambridge”, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 17, 1939–40, pp. 113–29; M. Rubin, *Charity and community in medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 282–8; and R. Lovatt, “Two collegiate loan-chests in late-medieval Cambridge”, in *Medieval Cambridge: essays on the pre-Reformation university*, pp. 129–65.



1. A Cambridge University chest of the fifteenth century. As a security device, several keyholders were required to be present to open the multiple locks. The chest is kept in the Old Schools, University of Cambridge.

to be deposited whose value usually had to exceed the size of the loan. For this reason, the borrowers tended to be the more advanced students who were not wholly devoid of means, university masters, college fellows and also colleges as corporate bodies. At Oxford, Balliol, Merton, Exeter and Queen’s, and Peterhouse and the King’s Hall at Cambridge, all borrowed extensively from either university or college chests to facilitate cashflow in the late-medieval period.<sup>88</sup>

Most loan-chests were governed by a sliding scale that allowed more senior academics to borrow more than those of lesser status. Moreover, the statutes of several chests confined loans to those who were of at least sophister rank, that is undergraduates of two-years’ standing, so excluding many of the younger students from the potential benefits of the loan system. Students whose money had dwindled to virtually

88. Aston & Faith, “The endowments of the university and colleges”, pp. 285–6, 301–2; also A. F. Butcher, “The economy of Exeter College, 1400–1500”, *Oxoniensia* 44, 1979, pp. 41–5. For the detailed workings of the Barnard Castle loan-chest of Peterhouse and the Billingford chest of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, along with their pattern of loans, see Lovatt, “Two collegiate loan-chests in late-medieval Cambridge”, pp. 129–65.

nothing had the option of interrupting their studies and returning to Oxford or Cambridge if and when their resources permitted. This option became more difficult to exercise when residence in a hall, hostel or college was made obligatory at Cambridge from the late-fourteenth century and at Oxford from the early-fifteenth century.<sup>89</sup> Clearly, the obligation of residence made it more complicated for a student to withdraw and return to the university according to fluctuating finances, although it was still possible to do so. Moreover, the growing apparatus of controls that permeated the student body in the later-medieval period institutionalized undergraduates to a greater degree than had been the situation in the thirteenth century, and this tended to place curbs on student mobility.

There were means by which a financially embarrassed student could earn a modest amount of money. For example, students could work in college or hall gardens. They could serve as casual labourers on building projects within the university precinct.<sup>90</sup> They might become servants to wealthier scholars or to masters, and they could perform menial duties by waiting at table or helping in the kitchen of the hall, hostel or college to which they belonged in return for a reduction in the cost of board and lodging. As previously mentioned, undergraduates could undertake paid work as copyists of manuscripts for stationers in the town. If particularly fortunate, a poor scholar might be the recipient of one of the charitable endowments that were established by a wide circle of benefactors, ranging from members of the royal family to former university bedels.<sup>91</sup> In extreme cases, a student could resort to begging in imitation of the mendicant friars. Begging licences were occasionally issued by the English university chancellors so that licensed students would be allowed to beg without incurring prosecution.<sup>92</sup>

89. For obligatory residence at Cambridge see *Camb. Docs*, I, p. 317, and for compulsory residence at Oxford see Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, pp. 208, 226-7.

90. See, for example, payments to poor scholars for work in the garden of the King's Hall, Trinity College archives, King's Hall accounts, O. 13. 1. - 26, III, fol. 96; XXVI, fol. 180. Poor scholars assisted in the building of the new library at Merton College between 1373 and 1378: see H. W. Garrod, "Merton College", in *Victoria history of the county of Oxford. Volume 3*, p. 101.

91. See below, Chapter 4.

92. See Salter, *Registrum cancellarii oxoniensis*, II, p. 40 for begging licences granted to two poor students of Aristotle Hall in 1461. On this topic of student begging see Rashdall, *Universities*, III, pp. 406-7 and J. Paquet, "Coût des études, pauvreté et labeur: fonctions et métiers d'étudiants au moyen âge", *History of universities 2*, 1982, pp. 15-52.

While licences were still being granted into the sixteenth century, they were given sparingly because of the social infamy and disorder associated with begging in the community at large. The English universities and Paris had problems with beggars who infiltrated the academic population and who tried to pass themselves off as genuine students. Official student begging in England was conducted on a small scale compared with the extent of the practice in many universities in continental Europe. For example, in Hungary the begging student was a well-established and popular tradition in the Middle Ages.<sup>93</sup> Doubtless, a certain amount of unlicensed begging was indulged in by English students which, because of its clandestine nature, has gone unrecorded.

These various options could only have had a marginal effect upon the situation of the most disadvantaged students. Some poor scholars would obviously have been helped by one or more of these measures, but for others there was no financial rescue and withdrawal from the university seemed the only course of action. The English universities had no systematic plan for dealing with impoverished students. This is probably because genuine student poverty was a more limited phenomenon at Oxford and Cambridge than in many continental universities. Arts faculties in several of the German universities, for example, dispensed poor scholars, either wholly or partially, from matriculation fees, from obligatory attendance at lectures and other academic occasions, from rules about prescribed dress and from compulsory residence in university premises.<sup>94</sup> Some relaxation in degree fees were made in favour of poor students at Bologna, Avignon and Aix-en-Provence in the fifteenth century. On the other hand, the statutes of the University of Toulouse made no concessions to poor scholars in respect of their debts.<sup>95</sup> Low-rate hostels for impoverished scholars were made available at the Universities of Freiburg, Erfurt and Vienna.<sup>96</sup> The definition of poverty varied within German universities, and in some centres students who pleaded poor status had to submit testimonial letters from their home municipalities in support of their claim.<sup>97</sup>

93. *ibid.*, p. 49, n. 146.

94. Fletcher, "Wealth and poverty in the medieval German Universities", pp. 423-35.

95. Paquet, "Coût des études", p. 20.

96. Fletcher, "Wealth and poverty", pp. 425-6.

97. *ibid.*, pp. 424-5. For the different forms of proof required by medieval universities to establish the threshold for student poverty see Paquet, "Recherches sur l'universitaire 'pauvre'", pp. 328-35.

The English universities appear not to have found it necessary to define undergraduate poverty, and there was probably only meagre official relief for the genuinely poor scholar. There are clear statutory statements that the fines of student malefactors could not be excused on the grounds of penury. At Oxford, statutes of 1410 and 1432 emphasized that all scholars of whatever condition who transgressed statutory regulations, including those who claimed poverty, were equally bound to pay their fines. However, the late-fourteenth-century statutes of Cambridge University decreed that regent masters were not to obstruct the admission of scholars who could swear to their poverty.<sup>98</sup> This may imply that such entrants were dispensed from some categories of fees, although the matter is ambiguous. In general, the attitude of the English universities towards the problems of student hardship was one of pragmatism. There were few sophisticated arrangements for alleviating undergraduate poverty. Indeed, the issue seems not to have led to anything that could be described as a co-ordinated university policy.

Whereas the English universities, as corporate bodies, did not give significant aid to poor undergraduates, several of the secular colleges made statutory provision for the charitable teaching of poor grammar youths. Strictly speaking, such youths were not undergraduates in a literal sense, but if they made good progress there was the possibility that they might be advanced to the position of scholar. For example, the earliest surviving statutes of Peterhouse, Cambridge, of 1344 envisaged charitable support for two or three grammar boys if the college finances would allow. If they proved to be promising, they might be promoted to scholarships, otherwise they were to be removed. A similar arrangement was made in the statutes of 1359 of Clare College, Cambridge, whereby ten poor boys were to be instructed in grammar, singing and logic until the age of 20, after which they were either to be made scholars or excluded from the college.<sup>99</sup> It has to be said, however, that most English colleges did not have the resources to sustain their statutory complements of fellows and so had little to spare for charitable teaching. The founder of Queen's College, Oxford, Robert of Eglesfield, had planned for the instruction of poor boys in grammar,

98. For Oxford see Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, pp. 205, 241; for Cambridge *Camb. Docs*, I, p. 332.

99. For Peterhouse and Clare see *Camb. Docs*, II, pp. 24-6, 140-1.

singing, logic and philosophy up to the limit of 72. The founder's well-intentioned scheme, contained in the statutes of 1341, remained largely a dead letter because only a few charity boys had entered the college by 1500.<sup>100</sup>

Clearly, a top priority within English colleges was to preserve the level of financial support for their fellows. If the maintenance of charity boys diverted scarce resources from this central purpose, the statutory provisions for charitable teaching would almost certainly be severely curtailed. It is evident that the charitable teaching of grammar in English colleges was a very minor activity. It was far less developed than in some of the Parisian colleges, notably the College of the Sorbonne and the Ave Maria College.<sup>101</sup>

The genuinely poor undergraduate, however defined, was probably a minority figure in the medieval English universities and, so equally, at the other end of the social spectrum, was the son of a noble family. The universities had a natural interest in trying to attract youths of elevated status in the expectation of increasing political patronage and monetary contributions. In return, noble students would anticipate some relaxation of academic requirements and the enjoyment of certain privileges. However, it needs to be stressed that, prior to the sixteenth century, the preferential treatment accorded to English noble students was decidedly modest in comparison with that conferred upon noble scholars in many continental universities. It seems that the medieval English universities were tempted to exaggerate the extent to which they were the academic nurseries of the nobility. For example, in 1480 Oxford University sent letters to the Bishop of Salisbury, Richard Beauchamp, and to Edward IV concerning Edward de la Pole, second son of the Duke of Suffolk and nephew of the king, who had been brought up in the bishop's household. In the course of the correspondence the

100. *Statutes*, I, ch. 4, p. 30. On the actual and meagre provision made for poor boys see R. H. Hodgkin, "The Queen's College", in *Victoria history of the county of Oxford*, Volume 3, p. 132.

101. For the practice of charity at the College of the Sorbonne and the Ave Maria College see Cobban, *The medieval universities: their development and organization*, p. 150; see also A. L. Gabriel, *Student life in Ave Maria College, medieval Paris* (Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), ch. 6, and Gabriel, "The practice of charity at the University of Paris during the Middle Ages: Ave Maria College", *Traditio* 5, 1947, pp. 335-9.



university boasted that it had maintained many sons of noble families, and it gave the impression that it had for long been a natural venue for the education of the nobility.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, in 1357 Richard FitzRalph, Archbishop of Armagh, chancellor of Oxford University between 1332 and 1334 and vituperative opponent of the friars, made a speech at the papal court at Avignon in which the friars were accused of bribery and enticing young undergraduates into their ranks without reference to their parents. The archbishop drew the conclusion that parents were now deterred from sending their sons to university out of fear of the mendicants.<sup>103</sup> In modern parlance, the friars were here viewed as a brainwashing cult. In 1358 an Oxford statute was passed that encapsulated FitzRalph's arguments. The statute stated specifically that noble families were among those who had ceased to send their sons to the university because of the reputation of the friars as virtual abductors of young undergraduates who had not yet reached the age of discretion.<sup>104</sup> These contemporary views are interesting, although they are not very illuminating about the extent of the noble contingents at Oxford in the medieval period.

Royal support for English noble students dates from the thirteenth century when Henry III maintained a half-brother, Aymer of Lusignan, and other distant relatives at Oxford, including Peter of Aubusson and Nicholas of Blaya. The king also maintained at Oxford Guy, brother of the Count of Auvergne.<sup>105</sup> Henry's support for Guy began in 1226 and arose from a military treaty made between the king and the count in 1225. Military alliances and kinship were the motivating factors behind Henry III's sponsorship of noble youths at Oxford. There is no evidence of direct monetary aid for noble university students on the part of Henry's successor, Edward I. Moreover, there are relatively few known instances of royal maintenance of noble scholars at either Oxford or Cambridge in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The occasional royal support for individual non-noble students is found. In 1302 or 1303 Edward I maintained Thomas of Duns, a Scot, and Richard of

102. H. Anstey (ed.), *Epistolae academicae oxoniensis* (2 vols), Oxford Historical Society 35, 36 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1898), II, pp. 453-6, 461-2.

103. A. G. Little, *The grey friars in Oxford* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 79.

104. *ibid.*, p. 80; Lytle, *Oxford students and English society*, p. 40.

105. F. Pegues, "Royal support of students in the thirteenth century", *Speculum* 31, 1956, pp. 455-8.

Nottingham at Oxford. Their daily allowance of 6d and their robes were charged to the Prince of Wales.<sup>106</sup> Rather than supporting individual students, however, English kings and their queens were more attracted to founding or refounding entire colleges. Cases in point are the King's Hall, King's College and Queens' College at Cambridge, and at Oxford, Oriel College and Queen's College.

Although sons of noble families were present at Oxford and Cambridge from the thirteenth century, it was not until the hundred years between c.1450 and c.1550 that their presence became especially significant. The introduction of humanist studies goes some way towards explaining the increasing attraction of a university education for the English nobility. Of particular importance here was the humanist ideal, fuelled by the influence of Plato's *Republic*, that only those who were qualified for government, either in terms of specific skills or of a broadly based education, were entitled to participate in the exercise of power. This was a notion that held threatening overtones for England's nobility. Unless the nobility embraced higher education as a leading priority, there was a danger that it would be excluded from the business of government and be rendered an emasculated class. Humanism brought with it the idea that a meritocracy was a surer and more equitable basis for government and administration than one built upon the outmoded concept of an aristocracy of birth. These arguments that were derived from political theory were conjoined with the practical consideration that the growing complexities of government under the Yorkists and early Tudors created an even greater demand than hitherto for the highly educated lay or ecclesiastical civil servant who was a product of Oxford or Cambridge or of one of the Inns of Court in London. Professional attitudes were coming to prevail in governing circles, and the nobility had to adapt to the changing climate or risk a partial eclipse. In an act of self-preservation the English nobility responded to the challenge, and the large influx of noble students in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries transformed Oxford and Cambridge into highly stratified and privileged communities. The working milieu of the English undergraduate was very different in the sixteenth and

106. Emden, *BRUO*, I, p. 610 (Duns); *ibid.*, II, p. 1379 (Nottingham); D. E. R. Watt, *A biographical dictionary of Scottish graduates to AD 1410* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 168 (Duns).

seventeenth centuries from what it had been in the less divisive and more heterogeneous university scene of the pre-Tudor age.

It has been calculated that between 1307 and 1485 at least 88 members of 42 noble families were admitted to the English universities. Of these, 69 are found at Oxford and 19 at Cambridge, while some obtained degrees at both. The distribution of noble entrants over the period was uneven, there being 51 in the fourteenth century and 37 in the fifteenth century.<sup>107</sup> This disparity may not be significant given the lack of centralized matriculation records before the second half of the sixteenth century. Most of the noble university students were younger sons. While some pursued secular lives as courtiers or landowners, in the main they followed ecclesiastical careers, and 15 noble students became bishops in the fourteenth century and 16 in the fifteenth century.<sup>108</sup>

Some noble families sent sons to university over several generations. At least eight sons of the Neville family received a university education as did five sons of both the Charlton and Scrope families. The Courtenay family sent four sons to university and the de la Pole family sent three.<sup>109</sup> It is known that some noble undergraduates had private tutors at university. Richard of Aston was granted leave of absence from an ecclesiastical living in 1312 to serve as a private tutor at Cambridge to Thomas of Segrave, son of Sir John of Segrave.<sup>110</sup> It is almost certain that all noble students would have retained servants, and some of them lived in style with their tutors and servants in private accommodation. In the fourteenth century the grandiose lodgings at Oxford of Edmund Arundel, son of Richard, Earl of Arundel, and of William Courtenay, fourth son of Hugh, Earl of Devon, and later Chancellor of England and Archbishop of Canterbury, were even fitted out with private oratories.<sup>111</sup> Other noble undergraduates were attached to a college as fee-paying commoners or were resident in halls, hostels or inns. It would have been very difficult for a noble undergraduate to acquire a fellowship

107. For this analysis of noble entrants see J. T. Rosenthal, "The universities and the medieval English nobility", *History of Education Quarterly* 9, 1969, pp. 415-18.

108. *ibid.*, pp. 418-19.

109. Lytle, *Oxford students*, p. 129.

110. For Richard of Aston see Emden, *BRUO*, I, p. 68.

111. *ibid.*, I, p. 48 (Arundel), pp. 502-4 (Courtenay).

in a college where undergraduates were admitted as fellows or probationary fellows because most colleges excluded wealthy students from enjoying maintenance from the resources of the foundation.

As formerly mentioned, medieval English undergraduates made plentiful use of model student letters that were crafted by professional writers or *dictatores* according to strict rules of rhetorical composition. Although many surviving student letters are not originals but stereotypes adapted to meet the student's personal concerns, it may be supposed that they would be representative of the main features of undergraduate life. These letters are, however, rhetorical devices. They almost certainly exaggerate student hardships in order to evoke a sympathetic response in the recipient, whether a father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, cousin, guardian or influential patron. A persistent theme of these letters was the plea for more money for items such as room rents and board, university fees, degree expenses, articles of clothing, the purchase of texts for specific courses of study, a journey home and a host of other necessities.<sup>112</sup> Although these letters give incidental information about various aspects of the student condition, they reveal little of the teaching regime, the oral examinations and academic exercises, or of the routine of university life in college, hall or hostel. As a result, the letters do not allow the construction of a student's typical day. This is all the more vexatious when it is remembered that nothing approximating to a diary of an English tutor or student has been unearthed for the medieval period. It is only from the seventeenth century that there have survived detailed guidelines devised by tutors for the behaviour and studies of their pupils. Two of the most illuminating of these seventeenth-century sets of tutorial instructions are those of Richard Holdsworth, fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, and later master of Emmanuel College, and James Duport, fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and subsequently master of Magdalene College.<sup>113</sup>

112. C. H. Haskins, *Studies in medieval culture* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929), ch. 1; also Salter, Pantin & Richardson, *Formularies*, II, pp. 331-450.

113. For the guidelines of Holdsworth and Duport see the discussion by M. H. Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge in transition 1558-1642* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 108-14. See also a copy of Duport's rules, Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O. 10A. 33.

While most student letters emphasize depleted resources, it need not be assumed from this that the senders of these pleas for money were poverty-stricken in any absolute sense. A student who sent such a letter may have been suffering from a temporary lack of coin arising from the periodic shortage of hard currency that affected English society in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>114</sup> Again, the price inflation caused in part by lean harvests might squeeze the student's finances to an alarming degree. An affluent family could quickly alleviate a sudden financial hardship. On the other hand, if the student was guilty of monetary extravagance or riotous behaviour, or had failed to make satisfactory progress, the situation might not be so easily resolved. News of the youth's misdeeds would sometimes be communicated to the family or guardian or patron by the master with whom the student had registered, and monetary aid would be withheld until such time as a marked improvement had been monitored.<sup>115</sup> It was probably quite common for a family or patron to entrust the principal of a hall or hostel with an allowance for the undergraduate that would be dispensed in instalments either directly to or on behalf of the youth according to need. By this means, the principal could exercise a measure of social control over the student and, if misconduct arose, money could be held back as a disciplinary restraint.

While not underestimating the plight of undeniably poor students, it seems that most English undergraduates had reserves at a distance from which they could draw to tide them over a temporary crisis. As such, they should not be classified as living on the margins of poverty. Evidence for undergraduate expenditure in medieval Oxford and Cambridge is very hard to discover. However, a source of primary importance has been located in the unexpected guise of a logic notebook that belonged to master John Arundel who, in 1424, was the principal of an unnamed Oxford hall that may have been either Mildred Hall in Turl Street or (Great) Black Hall in School Street. Arundel was a fellow of Exeter College in 1424, and was later to become Bishop of Chichester and a

114. Jacob, *Essays in the conciliar epoch*, pp. 208–9, and Jacob, "English university clerks", p. 306.

115. See Salter, Pantin & Richardson, *Formularies*, II, pp. 360–1 for a letter in which money is withheld until bad conduct has been remedied. See also *ibid.*, II, pp. 370–1 for a letter in which a father hears good news of a son's progress from the youth's master and companions.

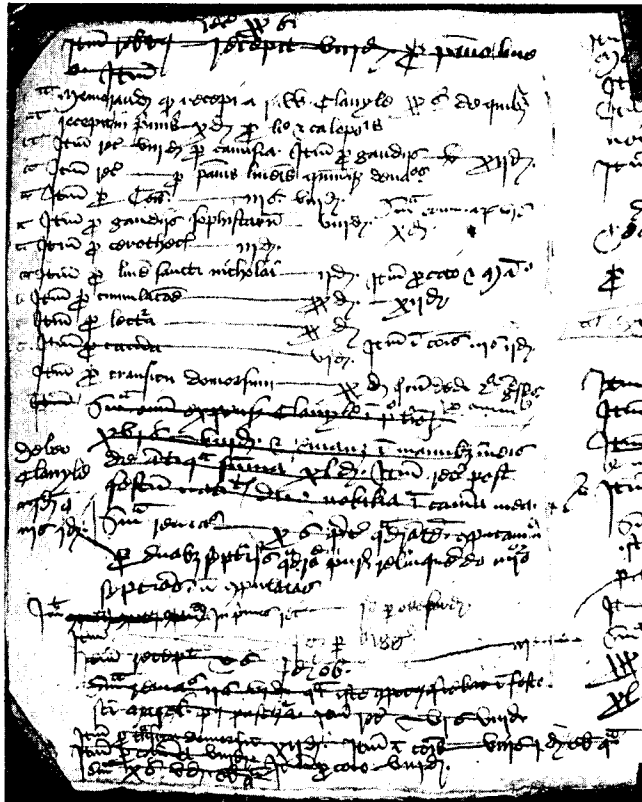
chaplain and physician first to Henry Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and then to Henry VI.

Arundel's logic notebook contains informal accounts of tutorial expenses that take the form of rough jottings made in a series of blank or semi-blank pages.<sup>116</sup> These accounts are probably the only undergraduate expenses to have survived from a medieval Oxford hall, and it seems that none have survived from a Cambridge hostel. The accounts show that Arundel acted as tutor to several undergraduate commoners and was in control of their finances. This evidence adds considerably to our knowledge of the living costs of undergraduate commoners in the late-medieval period. Arundel's record of tutorial expenses tends to corroborate the view that the expenditure of English undergraduates in the fifteenth century was of a relatively inexpensive character.

The only fully itemized account for a whole term is that for the undergraduate commoner, W. Clavyle, for the Michaelmas term of 1424. Clavyle's account embraced expenses for commons or basic items of food and drink, service charges and tips for domestic staff, the shared rent of a room, expenditure on feast occasions, books, clogs, clothes, linen and gloves, lecture fees, a payment for the light of St Nicholas and the cost of a journey home. In the aularian (hall) statutes of Oxford of the late-fifteenth century there is a requirement for all scholars in halls to contribute to the light of St Nicholas on 6 December, along with other communal expenses, under penalty of expulsion and seizure of goods.<sup>117</sup> Apart from Clavyle's account, there are two incomplete accounts that give totals for termly expenditure, those of the undergraduate commoners Okeford and Robert Canon.

116. These accounts are contained in North Devon Record Office, Barnstaple, MS B1/3960. For the analysis of Arundel's accounts that is given in the next two paragraphs and for further information see A. B. Cobban, "John Arundel, the tutorial system, and the cost of undergraduate living in the medieval English universities", *BJRL* 77, 1995, pp. 143–59. Other types of hall expenses have survived. The expenses of John Hychcok (Hichcock), who was apparently a bachelor of St Mary Hall, Oxford, have been preserved in Bodleian MS Lat. misc. d. 83 fol. 1. The expenses of Thomas Jolyffe, principal of Glasen Hall, Oxford, are recorded in Bodleian MS Digby 26 fol. 140v. Jolyffe's expenses are extremely difficult to decipher. Both lists were compiled in c.1460.

117. Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, p. 585. See also payments of 2d for the light of St Nicholas made by members of founder's kin at Merton College in J. M. Fletcher & C. A. Upton, "The cost of undergraduate study at Oxford in the fifteenth century: the evidence of the Merton College 'founder's kin'", *History of Education* 14, 1985, pp. 6–8, 12, 14–15.



2. A fully itemized account of the expenses of W. Clavyle, an undergraduate commoner resident in an Oxford hall, for the Michaelmas term of 1424. This account is taken from the logic notebook of John Arundel, the principal of the hall, who acted as Clavyle's tutor and who kept a record of the expenses incurred on behalf of the pupil.

Assuming that all three undergraduates were resident in hall for a minimum three-term period of 36 weeks, and making allowances for journeys to and from Oxford throughout the year, Clavyle's total costs would have been in the region of £2 13s, Okeford's costs came to about £1 12s, and Canon would have incurred expenditure in the order of £2 0s 3d. The variations in expenditure are to be explained by the differing amounts spent on personal items and on battels, the extra food and drink ordered over and above basic commons. These sums for total expenditure give weekly costs for Clavyle, Okeford and

Canon of 1s 6d, 10½d and 1s 1½d respectively, that is, about 2½d, 1½d and 2d a day. This is cheap living, a point underlined by the fact that, in the early-fifteenth century, a building craftsman earned about 5d or 6d a day, a building labourer about 3d or 4d a day, a thatcher about 4½d a day and a thatcher's mate about 3d a day. Both Clavyle and Okeford were charged only 6d a year for the rent of their rooms. It has to be remembered here that this low sum would be charged for only a share of the rent because it was usual for undergraduate commoners in Oxford halls to be housed two, three or four to a chamber. The annual sums of expenditure for Clavyle and Canon, though not for Okeford, are similar to those for founder's kin at Merton College, Oxford, in the second half of the fifteenth century. Over a three-term period of 36 weeks it has been reckoned that £2 12s 6d would have covered the expenses of a scholar of the founder's kin.<sup>118</sup> It has to be pointed out, however, that founder's kin were maintained from college resources and are not directly comparable with undergraduate commoners who were obliged to pay for their own board and lodging.

Apart from estimates of total expenditure, it is also possible to work out the cost of weekly commons, the standard food and drink requirements that were purchased each week by members of Arundel's hall. The outlay on commons for four undergraduate residents, namely W. Clavyle, Okeford, John Wode and John Russell, in 1424 is the only evidence of its kind so far discovered for any Oxford hall. In each of these four cases expenditure on commons amounted to less than 1d a day. This rate was similar to that paid by the grammarian, Robert Whittinton, who, as a student at Oxford in the late-fifteenth century, stated in 1520 that a commons rate of 7d a week was sufficient for an adequate standard of living. The low rates for Arundel's undergraduate commoners were far below those for fellows of most Oxford and Cambridge colleges. As a rule, the commons allowance for a college fellow was of the order of 1s a week, although this might be increased to statutory limits varying between 1s 3d and 1s 8d according to fluctuations in grain prices. Over and above this allowance, fellows had to find the money for extra food and drink from their own resources. In 1424, the year of Arundel's accounts, the average sums charged to each undergraduate and graduate fellow of the King's Hall, Cambridge, was

118. *ibid.*, p. 16.

just over 3d a day.<sup>119</sup> Fellows of the King's Hall received a flat rate allowance of 1s 2d a week or 2d a day from the exchequer for their commons, and had to bear the cost of any surplus from private income.

The undergraduate fellows of the King's Hall must have enjoyed a standard of living well above the average level that obtained for graduate fellows in most English colleges. It is also noteworthy that the commons rate for undergraduate fellows of this royal college was approximately three times that of the undergraduate commoners who lived in Arundel's unendowed hall and who were wholly unsubsidized. Assuming that the charges in Arundel's hall are typical of those normally levied on arts undergraduates in halls and hostels of the period, it may be deduced that a commons rate of just under 1d a day was probably representative of the daily outlay on basic items of food and drink of the average undergraduate commoner in the fifteenth century. It is almost certain, however, that those few undergraduates who were college fellows before the sixteenth century were considerably better off than undergraduate commoners in halls and hostels.

In addition to the evidence from Arundel's hall, several annual grants to medieval students have been recorded that indicate a wide variation in costs. In 1323 Richard Bruche, the son of a Lancashire gentry family, received £1 13s 4d for maintenance for one year at Oxford, and this included 13s 4d for a robe. In 1374 a wealthy London mercer, Robert of Brynkeleye, gave an itemized account for the support of a ward, Thomas, at Oxford for what appears to be about 13 years. Although the circumstances of Thomas' accommodation are unknown, total expenditure for each year seems to have come to £9 or £10. This level of expenditure was four or five times that of Arundel's undergraduates. On the other hand, John Cely received the annual sum of £2 13s 4d in the 1480s as a paternal gift towards expenses at Oxford. This is similar to the estimated expenditure for an assumed 36 weeks of £2 13s for W. Clavyle, the undergraduate commoner whose finances have been discussed.<sup>120</sup> Further examples of maintenance grants could

119. Cobban, *The King's Hall*, table 5 (facing p. 126), columns 1 and 16. For a full analysis of the standard of living of the fellows of the King's Hall see *ibid.*, ch. 4. For Whittinton's statement see A. B. Emden, *An Oxford hall in medieval times* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 195.

120. For Richard Bruche see Evans, "The number, origins and careers of scholars", p. 504; for Robert of Brynkeleye see H. T. Riley (ed.), *Memorials of London and*

be cited, but there is a problem of comparability in that it is not always known if the amounts given are for all or only part of the student's expenses.

Whereas most arts undergraduates in halls and hostels probably paid less than 1d a day for their commons, an Oxford statute of a.1380 mentions three rates of commons for both masters and scholars living in halls.<sup>121</sup> The first rate covers those who paid up to 8d a week, and Arundel's undergraduate commoners fall within this category. The second and third categories embraced those who paid from 8d to 1s and those who paid more than 1s a week. It is indicated that these higher rates would be paid by masters or by law students who would be expected to pay more than arts students. It is known that some scholars embarked upon a law degree without a prior degree in arts. For this reason, halls for legists would have accommodated at least some undergraduate members. As a result, it is likely that legist halls had differentiated rates for commons to meet the needs of both undergraduate and graduate inmates.

The above estimates for total annual expenditure by undergraduate commoners do not take into account the heavy fees that students had to pay if they proceeded to the BA degree. These fees would be very disabling if the student did not have the assurance of financial support from the family or from an alternative source of patronage. John Lane, a member of the founder's kin of Merton College, was charged £1 14s 6d in 1424–5 arising from the admission and determination ceremonies involved in taking the degree of bachelor of arts. This sum was virtually the same as the cost of Lane's annual commons, although, in this instance, the expenditure was probably borne by the college.<sup>122</sup> If this expenditure on degree fees is at all typical for English undergraduates, it is easy to understand why some students had to postpone or even abandon plans to acquire the lower arts degree. High degree expenses were equally a problem in continental universities. For example, the University of Bologna had particularly onerous degree fees and, to

*London life in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries* (London, Longmans, 1888), p. 379 and Lytle, *Oxford students*, pp. 10–11; for John Cely see A. Hanham, *The Celys and their world* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 256.

121. Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, p. 183.

122. J. M. Fletcher & C. A. Upton, "Expenses at admission and determination in fifteenth-century Oxford: new evidence", *English Historical Review* 100, 1985, p. 335.

escape this burden, some students would enrol for courses at Bologna and would migrate to other Italian universities such as Padua, Pavia, Perugia, Siena and Ferrara so that they could take their degrees at more economical rates. In the medieval Spanish universities there are recorded cases of newly elected lecturers who, in order to take an obligatory degree, were driven to take out loans or to seek advance instalments of their salaries in an effort to meet the heavy degree costs.<sup>123</sup>

Despite the real hardship caused by high degree expenses, the potential range of support for students was quite extensive. Apart from close members of the family, undergraduates might receive assistance from surrogate relatives including stepfathers, godfathers and guardians of wards, as well as a considerable array of lay or ecclesiastical patrons ranging from archdeacons to bishops and abbots.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, students often benefited from their fathers' wills. In 1416 John Brokeman, esquire of Hertfordshire, left £10 as a contribution towards the education of a son at either Oxford or Cambridge. By the codicil to a will that was added in 1509, the wife of Robert Rydon, a law graduate of Oxford and a justice of the peace, was entrusted with the family estate until their son would inherit at the age of 21 years. This arrangement was on the understanding that revenues from the estate would be used to give their son an education at Oxford.<sup>125</sup> From the evidence of inventories of the possessions of Oxford scholars of the mid-fifteenth century there is reason to suppose that the level of material comfort may have been somewhat greater in the fifteenth than in the thirteenth century. These inventories show that it was fairly common for fifteenth-century students to own, in addition to their clothes, bedding, knives, spoons, candlesticks, books, pairs of bellows, lanterns, coffers, gimlets and musical instruments.<sup>126</sup> This reinforces the impression derived from Arundel's accounts that most fifteenth-century undergraduate commoners enjoyed living standards that transcended the bare necessities.

123. For degree fees at Bologna see R. C. Schwinges, "Student education, student life", in *A history of the university in Europe*, I, p. 239. For degree fees in the Spanish universities see Cobban, "Elective salaried lectureships", pp. 667-8; see also R. L. Kagan, *Students and society in early modern Spain* (Baltimore, Md., The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 165, n. 23.

124. See, for example, Evans, "The number, origins and careers of scholars", pp. 506-7; also Lytle, *Oxford students*, pp. 53-5.

125. *ibid.*, p. 45.

126. Salter, *Registrum cancellarii oxoniensis*, I, pp. 83-4, 160-1, 321, 352.

The undergraduate's life proceeded within an evolving disciplinary framework. Initially, the English universities attempted to exercise discipline by means of the matriculation rolls. The registration of students helped to separate out the committed from the false undergraduates who had no intention of following an approved course of study and who gave themselves over to idleness and the libertine pleasures of the university town. Beyond this, however, the disciplinary benefits of the matriculation system were rather limited. This was so because masters and registered students met normally within the context of the lecture room, and outside of this arena the students went largely unsupervised. The disciplinary net was much widened when the principals of halls and hostels and the heads of colleges assumed responsibility for undergraduate regulation. The Oxford aularian statutes of 1483-90 provide our sole insight into the code of discipline in the halls, there being no comparable set of statutes for the Cambridge hostels. By order of the chancellor's court at both Oxford and Cambridge a choice of punishments could be inflicted on undergraduates including fining, expulsion, imprisonment, excommunication and the denial of a degree. The statutes for the Oxford halls show that fining was the main form of retribution.<sup>127</sup>

The Oxford aularian statutes reveal that students would incur fines for causing a nuisance to fellow students, for creating disorder within the hall and for making derogatory remarks about particular countries or classes in society. Scholars were also fined for bringing the honour of the hall into disrepute, for consorting with persons of dubious character, for taking part in prohibited games, for climbing in and out of hall during hours of closure, and for spending a night away from hall without permission or leaving Oxford without licence. The carrying of weapons was forbidden except when a student was undertaking a journey. Otherwise, students were fined if found in possession of weapons or if they had loaned them to associates or if they had given them to a townsperson to hold secretly on their behalf. There were fines for bringing an unsheathed knife to table, for injuring a student with a fist or stone or by any other means. If blood was shed, the fine would be doubled, and if the assault was repeated, the offending student was to be expelled.

127. For much of the content of the following two paragraphs see the Oxford aularian statutes in Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, pp. 574-88; see also Emden, *An Oxford hall in medieval times*, ch. 9.

Arising from the perceived threat of Wyclifism and Lollardy, students in hall were to be fined if they repeatedly expressed heretical views. An army of financial penalties were prescribed to ensure that students observed the regulations concerning academic courses and that they maintained a proper commitment to their studies. In common with the situation in most medieval universities, the Oxford aularian statutes insisted that only Latin was to be spoken within the precincts of the hall, although exceptions in the form of the vernacular were allowed on feast occasions and principal festivals. The requirement to speak Latin is highlighted in the *Manuale scholarium*, a treatise that assumes the shape of a rather stagy dialogue between two students at Heidelberg University in the late-fifteenth century. In this guidebook for freshmen there was an obligation on students to report others who failed to speak Latin in the university lecture rooms or in their lodgings. At Heidelberg and other German universities an official called the "wolf" (*lupus*) was specifically appointed to spy on students and keep a register of those who spoke the vernacular and to exact fines from offenders.<sup>128</sup> The "wolf" does not appear to have surfaced as an official in the English universities but, in addition to the Oxford aularian statutes, the stipulation to speak Latin is found in many sets of college statutes, although at Peterhouse and the King's Hall, Cambridge, and at Oriel and Queen's, Oxford, French was tolerated as an alternative.<sup>129</sup>

Some halls did not provide meals, a point that is made clear in the aularian statutes. Students from such places were obliged to eat in other halls where meals and lectures were available, their own hall being used primarily for sleeping and study. At the time of the aularian statutes there were two principal meals in the halls and colleges, namely dinner at about 10 or 11 am and supper at about 5 pm. Breakfast was still optional. Breakfast was presumed in the statutes of the King's Hall of 1380, and at the College of Verdale at Toulouse in 1337 breakfast might be given to youths under 20 years of age.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, in halls and colleges a measure of ale was sometimes served between dinner

128. R. F. Seybolt (trans. & ed.), *The manuale scholarium* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1921), pp. 66-7, 72-3.

129. *Camb. Docs*, II, p. 31 (Peterhouse); Rouse Ball, *The King's Scholars and King's Hall*, p. 65; *Statutes*, I, ch. 3, p. 8 (Oriel), ch. 4, p. 14 (Queen's).

130. Rouse Ball, *The King's Scholars and King's Hall*, p. 65; Fournier, *Les statuts et privilèges*, I, p. 547; Rashdall, *Universities*, III, p. 407, n. 2.

and supper and before retiring to bed.<sup>131</sup> It is of interest that the aularian statutes tried to enforce good table etiquette, and unpunctuality or over-lengthy sessions at hall meals were punished by fines and forfeiture of food. Students were encouraged to have respect for their immediate habitat. They were fined for disturbing floor coverings of rushes or straw, for defacing hall property and for spillages on tablecloths, and they were expected to make monetary reparations for all breakages. Within the surroundings of the hall students were to be restrained by means of fines from running across the grass or trampling down plants, and they were to help in maintaining the gardens when required. In the interests of hygiene, hall residents were forbidden to wash their hands in the well-bucket. On the recreational front, hall students were forbidden to take part in gambling or to keep sporting dogs, ferrets, hawks and other small birds.

In contrast with the halls, the system of fines was only occasionally deployed in the colleges. In the statutes of Brasenose College, Oxford, of 1521 fines were imposed for feuding and for late attendance or disorderly behaviour at lectures. At the King's Hall fines were initially used as a method of discipline, but the system had apparently been discarded by 1380. There are no references to fining in the statutes of that year, and the voluminous college accounts are silent on the matter.<sup>132</sup> Apart from the ultimate deterrent of expulsion, the main disciplinary device that was employed in the colleges was the deprivation of commons for periods that varied according to the nature of the misdeed. Deprivation of commons persisted as a penalty through to the sixteenth century, and was clearly regarded as a proven and successful method of discipline.

Corporal punishment, as a mode of correction, appears to have been introduced into the English universities in the fifteenth century, although charity grammar boys were subject to physical correction at Queen's College, Oxford, in accordance with the statutes of 1341.<sup>133</sup> Clement Paston had received corporal punishment when studying at Cambridge before 1458. In that year Clement's mother, Agnes, wrote to Greenfield, the youth's new tutor in London, urging the use of

131. Emden, *An Oxford hall*, p. 211; Rashdall, *Universities*, III, p. 403.

132. For Brasenose see *Statutes*, II, ch. 9, pp. 16, 25-6; for the King's Hall see Cobban, *The King's Hall*, pp. 176-7.

133. *Statutes*, I, ch. 4, p. 30.

flogging, if necessary, as had been practised by Clement's master at Cambridge.<sup>134</sup> The Oxford aularian statutes charge the principals of halls with the task of administering corporal punishment to younger students on Saturday evenings as an alternative to fines.<sup>135</sup> The first known instance of corporal punishment in an English college occurs in the statutes of King's College, Cambridge, of the early 1440s whereby scholars and junior fellows could be beaten on the authority of the provost and the dean. The statutes of Magdalen College, Oxford, of 1479/80 permitted corporal punishment for the demies, the young scholars on the foundation in receipt of half of the fellows' allowance for commons. Physical punishment was prescribed for young fellows at both Christ's College, Cambridge, and at Brasenose College, Oxford, by their statutes of 1505 and 1521 respectively. A difficulty was to determine an agreed maximum age beyond which corporal punishment was deemed to be inappropriate. At Christ's College beatings were reserved for scholars of pre-adult age, the age of adulthood being left undefined. In the statutes of c.1525-7 of Thomas Wolsey, the founder of Cardinal College, Oxford, a maximum age of 20 years is stipulated. Dr Caius, in the statutes of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, of 1572, decreed 18 years as the uppermost limit for corporal correction. That physical punishment became a main form of correction for younger students in the sixteenth-century colleges may well be the result of the lowering in the average age of collegiate entrants in the Tudor era as the undergraduate population transferred gradually from halls and hostels to the colleges. Whipping was still being prescribed as a punishment for undergraduates of less than 18 years at Pembroke College, Oxford, founded in 1624, but it appears to have been seldom practised in English colleges by the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>136</sup>

There are few references to corporal punishment in continental universities before the sixteenth century, although a statute of 1413 at Vienna University contemplates flogging for the poorer category of students. At the opening of the sixteenth century the University of

134. Davis, *Paston letters and papers*, I, p. 41; Bennett, *The Pastons and their England*, p. 105.

135. Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, p. 587.

136. For corporal punishment at Gonville and Caius, King's College and Christ's see *Camb. Docs*, II, p. 271 (Gonville), p. 556 (King's); III, p. 191 (Christ's). For corporal punishment at Magdalen, Brasenose and Cardinal College see *Statutes*, II, ch. 8, pp. 76-7 (Magdalen), ch. 9, pp. 16, 19 (Brasenose), ch. 11, p. 70 (Cardinal); for whipping as a punishment at Pembroke College see *ibid.*, III, ch. 14, p. 12.

Tübingen prescribed corporal punishment as one means of restriction to quell serious internal disorder. The College of Montaigu at Paris was a very austere foundation, and the new statutes of 1503, drawn up by Jean Standonck, the head of the resuscitated college, authorized physical correction for violence or acts of rebellion.<sup>137</sup> Flogging is occasionally found in other Paris colleges of the sixteenth century, although the impression is gained that it was deployed less than in the English universities.

Despite the disciplinary controls that came into force between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries and the attempts made to enforce residence in halls, hostels and colleges, a minority of undergraduates remained persistent offenders and indulged in anti-social and criminal activities. In particular, the university authorities were concerned about the unattached students or "chamberdeacons", as they were called. Students of this kind were immortalized by Chaucer in the character of the student, Nicholas, of the *Miller's Tale*, who lodged in the town in the house of a carpenter and who was a cunning, licentious and likeable rogue.<sup>138</sup> In an Oxford statute of c.1410 these unattached scholars are described as "sleeping by day and haunting taverns and brothels by night, intent on robbery and homicide". This statute was not entirely effective, and in 1512 a further legislative effort was made to compel "chamberdeacons" to become institutionalized in halls and colleges.<sup>139</sup> Although there were at least 89 students in unlicensed lodgings in Oxford in 1562, it is clear that by the end of the sixteenth century the problem of "chamberdeacons" had been marginalized.<sup>140</sup> After a lengthy war of attrition the English universities had, by the seventeenth century, firmly established that members of the academic community had to be resident in approved accommodation and subject to university

137. For corporal punishment at the Universities of Vienna and Tübingen and at the College of Montaigu, Paris, see Rashdall, *Universities*, I, p. 527, n. 1; III, pp. 363 and n. 4, 369.

138. See J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), ch. 4.

139. For the statute of c.1410 see Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, p. 208; for the legislation of 1512 see C. J. Hammer, Jr, "Oxford town and Oxford University", in *The collegiate university*, J. McConica (ed.), vol. 3 of *HUO* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 112; E. Russell, "The influx of commoners into the University of Oxford before 1581: an optical illusion?", *EHR* 92, 1977, p. 731.

140. Hammer, "Oxford town and Oxford University", pp. 112-13.



jurisdiction. In the nineteenth century exceptions to this rule necessitated at Oxford the written permission of the vice-chancellor.<sup>141</sup>

It is surprising that the medieval English universities did not much use academic dress as a means of controlling the undergraduate population.<sup>142</sup> Before the sixteenth century there were few detailed regulations regarding the dress of undergraduates who lived in halls or hostels or in private lodgings beyond the obligation to wear decent clerical garb. Since this was ill-defined, clerical dress admitted of diverse styles and colours, and undergraduate dress was a medley of different hues and shapes for about three hundred years. Indeed, judging from items discovered in inventories such as red tabards and black and blue cloaks, there was probably not much to differentiate undergraduate dress from that of the laity of the period.<sup>143</sup> It was not until the sixteenth century that sombre, black gowns were imposed in an effort to achieve a uniformity that was thought to be conducive to good behaviour.

Undergraduates were sometimes tempted to ape the more decorative robes of graduates. In the fifteenth century Oxford had to legislate to prevent undergraduates from wearing hoods trimmed with silk or fur that were allowed only to masters or licentiates, persons of noble or royal blood, sons of members of parliament and those with private means of 60 marks or more annually.<sup>144</sup> Both undergraduates and graduates had to be restrained from emulating the fashions of lay society. In 1342 the Archbishop of Canterbury condemned the extravagance in the fashions of university scholars and clergy alike. Among the alleged outrages were long hair that was curled and powdered, stockings chequered with red and green, cloaks trimmed with costly furs, fingers bedecked with rings and expensive girdles that sported long knives.<sup>145</sup> Prior to the sixteenth century the only undergraduates who wore a recognizable uniform were those who were scholars or fellows of colleges with distinctive liveries. Liveries were certainly worn at Queen's, New College, All Souls, Magdalen and Corpus Christi, Oxford, and at

Gonville, Trinity Hall, the King's Hall, and King's College, Cambridge.<sup>146</sup> Of these, only New College, the King's Hall and King's College had significant quotas of undergraduates before 1500. The colour of the livery is rarely specified, but prohibitions of dress at New College and King's College encompassed chequered hose of red and green, pointed shoes, knotted hoods and beads. The royal livery was permitted at the King's Hall where members wore tunics and tabards of a blue or bluish-grey colour.<sup>147</sup> Uniform academic dress was established in several of the medieval Parisian colleges. At the College of Navarre the livery was black, at the College of Dormans-Beauvais it was blue, and grey capes were worn at the College of Montaigu.<sup>148</sup>

The recreational side of undergraduate life and the often turbulent relations with the townspeople of Oxford and Cambridge will be discussed in Chapter 6. Suffice it to say here that the exuberant aspect of English undergraduate life did not manifest itself in any form of student power. The phenomenon of student power that had originated at the University of Bologna in the early-thirteenth century had fanned out to embrace other universities in Italy and several of the universities of provincial France and Spain.<sup>149</sup> In the universities in Germany, Bohemia, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, England and Scotland student controls did not take root. Here, the northern concept of a university, one that was governed by the masters with students in the nature of academic apprentices, went largely unchallenged. By way of explanation, it may be said that the average northern undergraduate was less politically and less legally sophisticated than the typical southern student. Many of the law students of southern Europe, who were the architects of student-power movements, were recruited from wealthy backgrounds, some were of noble birth and some had held professional positions in

141. Pantin, *Oxford life in Oxford archives*, p. 10.

142. For Oxford academic dress see W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A history of academical dress in Europe until the end of the eighteenth century* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 60-106, and for Cambridge pp. 107-37.

143. Catto, "Citizens, scholars and masters", p. 155.

144. Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, pp. 239-40, 297; see also Anstey, *Munimenta academica*, I, p. 303.

145. Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, I, pp. 94-5.

146. *Statutes*, I, ch. 4, pp. 14, 16 (Queen's), ch. 5, pp. 45-6 (New College), ch. 7, p. 42 (All Souls); II, ch. 8, pp. 92-3 (Magdalen), ch. 10, pp. 84-5 (Corpus Christi); *Camb. Docs*, II, pp. 229-30 (Gonville), p. 419 (Trinity Hall), pp. 538-9 (King's), and the King's Hall statutes in Rouse Ball, *The King's Scholars and King's Hall*, p. 68.

147. For New College and King's see *Statutes*, I, ch. 5, p. 46; *Camb. Docs*, II, p. 539. For royal livery at the King's Hall see Cobban, *The King's Hall*, pp. 199-200.

148. A. L. Gabriel, "The college system in the fourteenth-century universities", in *The forward movement of the fourteenth century*, F. L. Udey (ed.) (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1961), p. 103.

149. The phenomenon of student power in the medieval period is examined by Cobban, "Medieval student power", pp. 28-66, and by Cobban, "Elective salaried lectureships", pp. 662-87.

society before coming to university. Mature students of this kind had a highly developed contractual view of university life. In the milieu of southern Europe, where universities were closely integrated with the organized professions, the students tended to see their universities as agencies whose services and staff were open to hire like any other business and which were to be used in the best interest of their paying customers. From the student standpoint, this necessitated varying degrees of control over the teaching staff who were to be made accountable to the student body for every aspect of their professional lives. These were remote assumptions for northern students who did not claim to constitute a fully-fledged profession, with all its concomitant rights, and they were content to be the academic equivalent of craft apprentices.

Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates were, in the main, adolescents and ill-equipped to generate and direct movements of student militancy. Moreover, they had little motivation to do so. In the English universities the masters' guilds afforded adequate protection for the undergraduate body. This contrasted with the situation in several of the southern universities where students were often rendered vulnerable in the face of the local commune, and they feared that their teachers could not defend them properly because they had identified too closely with communal rather than with student interests. Furthermore, the English universities did not accommodate a large foreign element. It was commonly the presence of foreign students in the universities of southern Europe that led to the formation of defensive student guilds, some of which went on to acquire a controlling voice in university affairs, or at least varying degrees of participation in areas of academic government. Nothing of this kind happened in the English universities. The sustained support given to Oxford and Cambridge by the English monarchy from the thirteenth century onwards helped to create an environment of relative security that acted as a brake upon the growth of student militancy.<sup>150</sup> Student unrest in the English universities usually took the mundane form of negative student violence between rival gangs of scholars or between scholars and inhabitants of the town.

The educational experience of most undergraduates in the medieval English universities revolved around their lectures and lecture notes,

150. See Cobban, *Medieval English universities*, p. 110; also P. Kibre, *Scholarly privileges in the Middle Ages* (London, W. Clowes for the Medieval Academy of America, 1961), ch. 9.

their disputations and other academic exercises, and what individual tutorial instruction may have been available. It is notable that the direct usage of books was not a prominent feature at the undergraduate level. Undergraduates did not apparently benefit much from the *exemplar-pecia* system.<sup>151</sup> This system is known to have operated in at least 11 of the medieval universities. It was a cheap method of manuscript production that enabled multiple copies to be made of portions of texts, commentaries, lectures and disputations from approved versions or *exemplars*. These *exemplars* were handed over to stationers in the town, and were divided into separate quires or *peciae* of varying length. Copies were made from the *peciae* either by professional scribes, by scholars of the university or by undergraduates who could add to their income by this laborious work. The finished copies were then made available for hire or purchase. So far as is known, the *pecia* system at Oxford was only in official use in the superior faculties of civil and canon law and theology where students had to own or borrow the prescribed texts.<sup>152</sup> However, it has been recently suggested that the *pecia* system at Oxford was not confined to stationers licensed by the university. Other booksellers, who had no connection with the university, may well have engaged in this activity on an independent basis.<sup>153</sup> If this is correct, Oxford undergraduates could have obtained copies of material relevant to the arts course from these unofficial booksellers. Whatever the case, there is no definite evidence for the *pecia* system at Cambridge, although it is improbable that it did not function there in some form.

Institutional libraries were of only limited use to English undergraduates before 1500. At Oxford the library begun by Thomas Cobham in c.1320 was, in 1412, confined to graduate use.<sup>154</sup> Likewise at Cambridge the university library was restricted to graduates in c.1490, although others in the company of graduates might also gain entry.<sup>155</sup> Most college libraries were primarily for the use of graduates. In those few colleges that had undergraduate members, such as the King's Hall and New College and later King's College, access to the college library

151. Pollard, "The *pecia* system in the medieval universities", pp. 145-61; Parkes, "The provision of books", pp. 462-70; and L. Bataillon, B. Guyot & R. H. Rouse (eds), *La production du livre universitaire au moyen âge: exemplar et pecia* (Paris, CNRS, 1988).

152. Pollard, "The *pecia* system in the medieval universities", p. 150.

153. Parkes, "The provision of books", pp. 467, 470.

154. Gibson, *Statuta antiqua*, p. 218.

155. *Camb. Docs*, I, p. 403.

was probably only through graduate fellows. In the halls and hostels principals and their graduate assistants would have possessed a modest store of books, and some of them were possibly made accessible to undergraduates. Bequests of books were made to halls and hostels, and at least two Oxford halls, Greek Hall and Hart Hall, appear to have had areas set aside as designated libraries.<sup>156</sup>

Ownership of books among undergraduates was almost certainly low, and this, combined with their restricted access to libraries, means that they were reliant upon oral forms of instruction to an extent that must have been a heavy tax on the memory. The cultivation of a good memory is a theme that is highlighted from time to time in contemporary educational comment. For instance, there are references to this in an early-fourteenth-century treatise that takes the form of a letter from a physician of Valencia to two sons studying at Toulouse.<sup>157</sup> The physician lays down the general precept that healthy exercise makes for a sound intellect and memory. In more bizarre vein, the physician urges the youths not to wear slippers in bed in summer because vapours will be generated that are bad for the brain and memory. Moreover, if exercise is not taken after a meal, noxious vapours will likewise harm the memory.

Given the fact that undergraduates were disadvantaged by having only a limited access to books, to at least one contemporary critic this would not have been a cause for lamentation. Richard of Bury, Bishop of Durham, bibliophile and formerly a tutor to the future Edward III, lambasted the treatment of books by young students. According to the author of the *Philobiblon*, students were liable to despoil books with catarrh from a running nose, with fragments of fruit or cheese or with spittle ejected from a mouth that was engaged in too much idle chatter. Further physical damage resulted from students taking naps with their heads on the books, or leaving straws as markers in a book when closed, or doodling in the margins, or cutting away margins to use for another purpose.<sup>158</sup> It is to be hoped that Richard of Bury's observations

156. Aston, Duncan & Evans, "The medieval alumni of the University of Cambridge", p. 17 and n. 22; N. R. Ker, "Oxford college libraries before 1500", in *The universities in the Middle Ages*, p. 293, n. 2.

157. This letter or treatise is printed by Thorndike, *University records and life in the Middle Ages*, pp. 154-60.

158. See M. MacLagan (ed.), *Philobiblon of Richard de Bury* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1960), pp. 156-61.

applied to only a few irresponsible students and that most had a proper respect for these valuable and scarce products.

Accommodation in halls, hostels and colleges was generally at a premium, and undergraduates often had to live in crowded conditions with between two and four to a chamber. In order to give some privacy for study, cubicles or "studies" were commonly made by partitioning off the ends or corners of rooms. If possible, each "study" would command a source of light, and would probably contain a seat, a desk, a book-cupboard or book-shelf, and sometimes a chest and a table.<sup>159</sup> The main part of the chamber would be given over to communal living and sleeping quarters. Most of the furnishings had to be introduced by the students, only bedsteads being normally provided. So it was that undergraduates had to equip themselves with mattresses, blankets and sheets, and any other item that would afford a modicum of comfort amid a rather spartan environment. The mounting pressures for the creation of "studies" is shown at the King's Hall where, in the fifteenth century, a proportion of the entrance dues of new entrants that would normally have gone towards a breakfast for members of the college was often diverted for the funding of chamber "studies".<sup>160</sup>

The medieval English universities provided a relatively peaceful context for undergraduate study. Their populations were less cosmopolitan than those in larger continental universities. It is true that the impact of Wyclifism and Lollardy at Oxford in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and the disruption at Cambridge caused by the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 were far from negligible events. Furthermore, the temporary academic migrations from Oxford to Northampton and Stamford and from Cambridge to Northampton clearly had an intermittently unsettling effect upon the tenor of university life. The recurrent menace of plague and other diseases of the fever variety caused considerable interruption to studies as well as suffering and death. Interhall feuding and

159. For "studies" at English colleges see R. Willis & J. W. Clarke, *The architectural history of the University of Cambridge and the colleges of Cambridge and Eton* (4 vols) (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1886), III, pp. 304-27; W. A. Pantin, "The halls and schools of medieval Oxford: an attempt at reconstruction", in *Oxford studies presented to Daniel Callus*, Oxford Historical Society, new ser. 16 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 86-7, 89. For the erection of "studies" at St John's College, Cambridge, in the seventeenth century see E. Miller, *Portrait of a college* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 26.

160. Cobban, *The King's Hall*, p. 220; King's Hall accounts, IX, fol. 93v; X, fol. 1v.

the many brawls with townspeople or between rival parties of scholars could only have been a maddening distraction for those students intent on serious study.

Despite these problems, English undergraduates could look forward to a fair measure of continuity in their academic life, at least in comparison with the often lengthy and severe dislocations that occurred in continental universities. The University of Bologna was closed down in 1286–9 and 1306–9, in 1338 and in 1336–7 as a result of the imposition of papal interdicts on the city.<sup>161</sup> In addition to these closures, there were at least nine further cessations of lectures and migrations of Bolognese doctors and law students in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and plague stoppages also happened on six occasions between 1348 and 1401.<sup>162</sup> Medieval English students were shielded from such excessive intrusions into their academic life. To that extent they were more fortunately placed than many of their continental counterparts.

161. Kibre, *Scholarly privileges*, p. 34.

162. *ibid.*, ch. 2; Rashdall, *Universities*, I, p. 589.

## CHAPTER TWO

# The postgraduate experience

A contemporary observer of the medieval English universities would probably have remarked on the general youthfulness of the teaching staff both in arts and in the superior faculties of law, theology and medicine. There were two main reasons for this. First, the idea of an organized academic profession was long in the making. A teaching position at a university was not generally seen as an end in itself. Rather it was an avenue for social advancement, a preparation for a new career move.<sup>1</sup> English university teachers or regents were mostly recruited from the ranks of the graduate students and so were often of middling to lower social origins. Since university teachers were generally located at the less influential end of the social spectrum, it is understandable that they would have a strong incentive to use their academic career as a springboard for greater recognition and reward. Whatever exalted notions they may have had of themselves, university teaching masters occupied only a modest niche in the social hierarchy of the age. The second factor that worked against the longevity of university careers in England stemmed from the absence of tenured posts. For almost three hundred years English university teachers had to exercise their craft without the benefit of salaried lectureships. Endowed lectureships had been gradually established in the universities of southern Europe in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The salaried university lectureship was a much later phenomenon in the

1. See, for example, the comments of J. Verger, "Teachers", in Ridder-Symoens (ed.), *A history of the university in Europe*, I, p. 167.